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The Washington Monthly

JUNE 1989/$3.00

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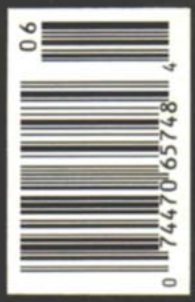
by Scott Shuger



20TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR 1989

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They're playing with America's future.

Mergers, takeovers, quick profits. They're part of the money-moving game a lot of U.S. corporations are playing today.

While the competition is investing in research, training and new equipment, American business is gambling on short-term deals that jeopardize our long-term security.

High stakes for America:

We're not investing. On key indicators like fixed investment and civilian R&D expenditures, Japan has **doubled** its lead over the U.S. since 1979. During this decade of merger mania, Japan's manufacturing productivity rose 60% faster than ours.

We're "debt poor." Around 25% of corporate cash flow now goes for debt service, including billions borrowed to pay for takeover games. That's money competitors in Japan and Europe can use for research and new product development.

Our technology's slipping. Foreign inventors were issued 47% of all U.S. patents last year—one-fifth of the total went to the Japanese alone.

We're exporting our strength. While the competition has been building technological and worker strength in their own nations, American corporations have hiked offshore investment by 50% since 1983—U.S.-based multinationals now do over 25% of their manufacturing **outside the U.S.**

There's greed at the top. American CEOs make up to **six times** what CEOs earn in 14 other industrial nations. Compensation for top U.S. executives shot up 51% in the last five years and bears no relation to company performance.

It's time to turn it around.

American business should put America's future first.

UAW

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The Washington Monthly

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LETTERS

Write to life

My only disappointment with Jason DeParle's stunning article ["Beyond the Legal Right," April] probing uncharted moral waters in the abortion controversy is that it ended up having a man as the author.

BARRIE SNEED
Asheville, North Carolina

I have never known *anyone* who had an abortion who took it lightly. Your question implies that some number of women do. If I were a woman, I would find that assumption grossly insulting.

My belief has been that even if the one-month-old fetus/embryo/baby/whatever is a human being, we kill human beings all the time in this society. We kill them for being too poor to afford medical care, for breathing polluted air, or for killing others. The benefits of abortions, if they are killings, outweigh the costs.

DOUGLAS WEINFIELD
Silver Spring, Maryland

On page 43 of his article on abortion, DeParle quotes someone named Barbara Ehrenreich as saying, "Would I feel comfortable getting rid of a fetus in the first few months of life? Yes, indeed, and I have done it without qualm." On the very next page he describes her as a person of conscience! I beg your pardon?

RORY FORAN
Glen Burnie, Maryland

Jason DeParle in his article reprints a quotation by me published in *Harper's*: "I'm not sure, by the way, that we should spend our time debating the ethical points of abortion. . . . Abstract ethical arguments over when life begins are not very illuminating. They inevitably become moralistic—and they inevitably carry the implication that people who support abortion are less moral than other people."

Although I spent almost an hour on the phone with DeParle explaining (rather patiently I thought) the context and meaning of this statement, he is using it here to prove something quite different.

Moral questions need to be discussed *in context*, with regard to the specific options that a person had at the time. The difference between "moral" and "moralistic" is precisely that the former involves putting oneself in another's place, imagining the actual context, while the latter often means preaching.

More generally, it is hard to take seriously the suggestion that feminists don't like to talk morally. Most feminists discuss issues in terms of justice and injustice, fairness and unfairness, freedom and lack of it—hardly value-neutral terms. Like many feminists I think it's immoral to require a woman to carry to term a pregnancy she doesn't want.

DeParle is repeating an old fallacy of intolerance: hearing alternative moral values as amoral, rather than different.

LINDA GORDON
Madison, Wisconsin

Jason DeParle's piece on abortion focuses narrowly on "feminists and liberals" who see abortion as a medical procedure lacking an inherently moral dimension. In so doing, DeParle misses the fundamental issue at stake for our society—whether we maintain a critical distinction between public and private values.

Those fighting to ban abortion see only one moral imperative: to preserve potential human life. But many other Americans, who agree that ending potential human life is wrong, also believe there can be acts *more* wrong: It can be more wrong to bring a child into this world that one does not want or cannot provide for. It can be more wrong to put a fetus above the needs of children or other loved ones already born and dependent on you. It can be more wrong to put a fetus's potential above one's own physical and mental health and above one's own potential to contribute to our world in ways other than childrearing.

Moreover, while some see abortion as a primary threat to the dignity of life, others see a ban on abortion as the larger threat—shifting the question of the meaning of human life from moral philosophy to embryology, and therefore reducing the essence of our humanity from social bonding to the pairing of gametes.

Focusing on what he perceives as a lack of moral sensibilities among feminists, DeParle misses this key point:

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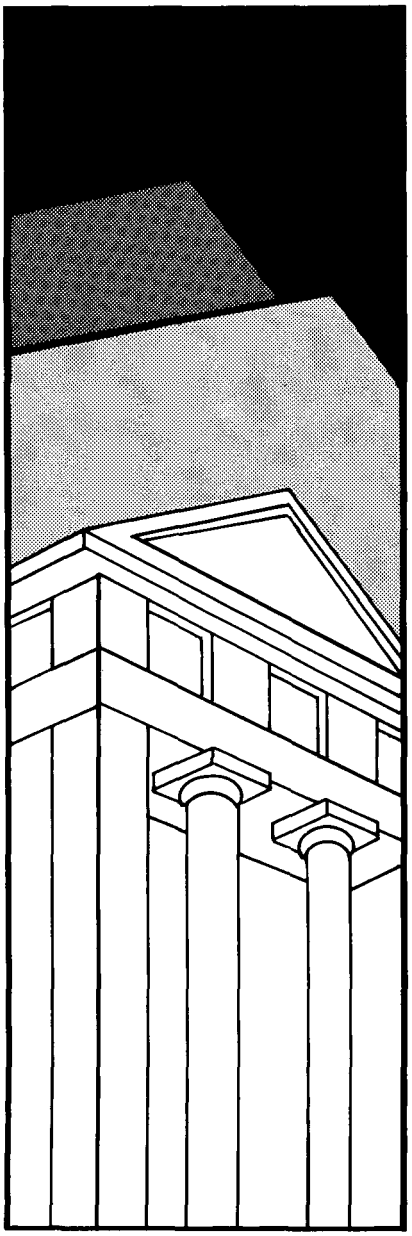

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Abortion is a question on which there are profound moral differences. And it is precisely for this reason that it must remain in the domain of private not public values. Public values are those essential to the functioning of a healthy society, values such as justice, democratic accountability, privacy, and civil liberty. On these public values we agree as a people. They make our private values possible—those personal, religious, and philosophical beliefs about which we do not agree and *we need not*. This crucial distinction is essential to a free society.

FRANCES MOORE LAPPE
Oakland, California

Major leagues

Yep, Claudell Washington has played for seven teams in a 15-year major league career ["Tilting at Windmills," April]. And yep, he's been a free agent. But in six (not seven) team changes, he was *traded* four times and left as a free agent only twice. If someone is forced to change jobs three times in four years, how can we expect him to develop any feeling of loyalty?

DONALD COFFIN
Chicago, Illinois

Bedtime stories

I don't like to dampen Matthew Cooper's admiration for the "great lines" flowing from the typewriter of sports reporter John Feinstein ["What The Washington Post Could Learn From Sports Illustrated," April]. The one about "looking like an unmade bed," however, was tossed off almost a half century ago by the great columnist Heywood Broun as a comment on his own appearance.

JACK ORMSBEE
Concord, Massachusetts

Fair weather farmers

In connection with an article by Tina Rosenberg ["Farm Workers Don't Have to be Poor," April], an editor at *The Washington Monthly* interviewed me in order to update information I had furnished Rosenberg earlier. I stated that I did not know very much about the new immigration law. However, I offered some information about the impact of immigration on migrant workers planting trees for large timber companies in the South. I *never* stated or implied that this process is applicable to the situation here.

Moreover, you cite me in order to support the claim that "these extra rights haven't made much difference" (presumably because the workers ultimately pay for them). But even if workers do trade off gross wages for old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and workers compensation, these newly vindicated rights are very important.

Although Rosenberg has put her finger on an important truth in saying that, "Farmers pay poorly not because they have to, but because they can," it is probably equally true that they will never have to until farmworkers organize strong unions.

MARC LINDER
Weslaco, Texas

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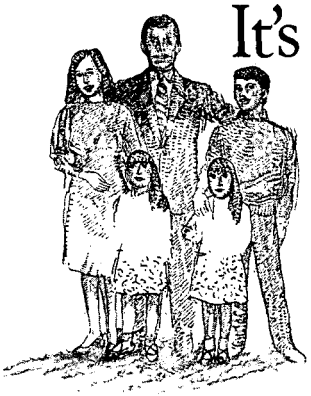

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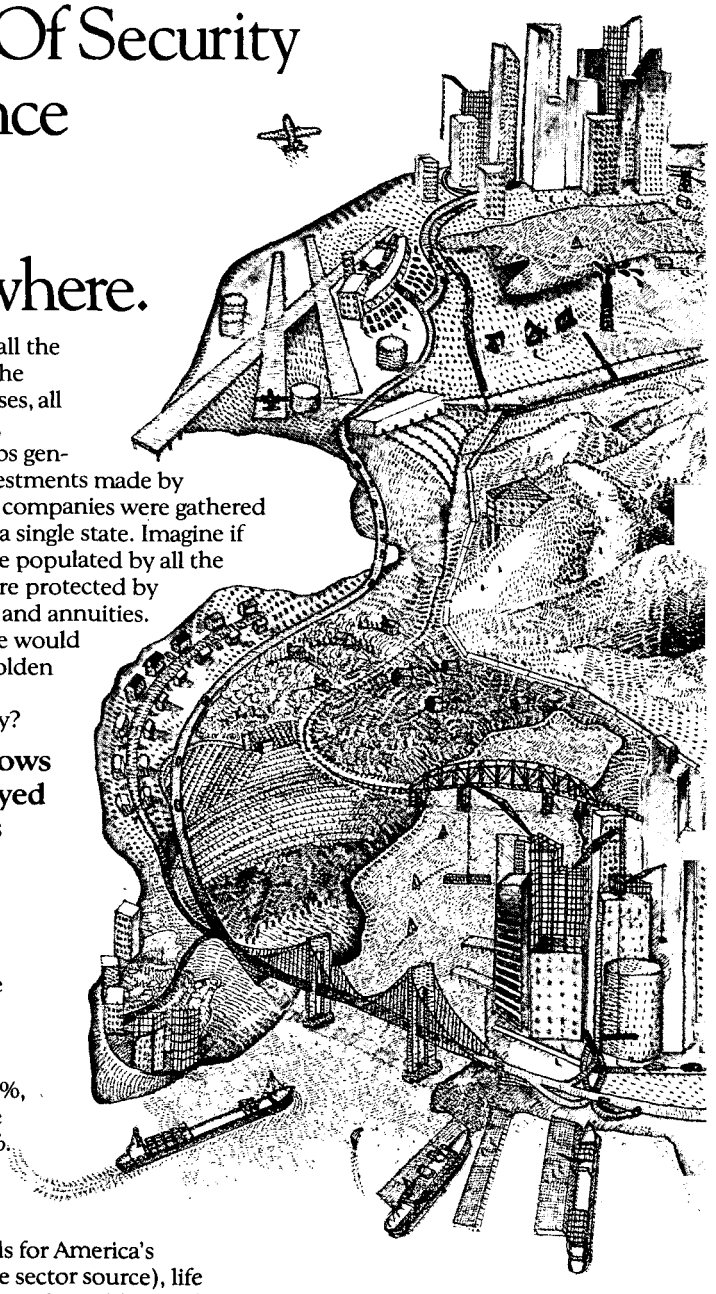

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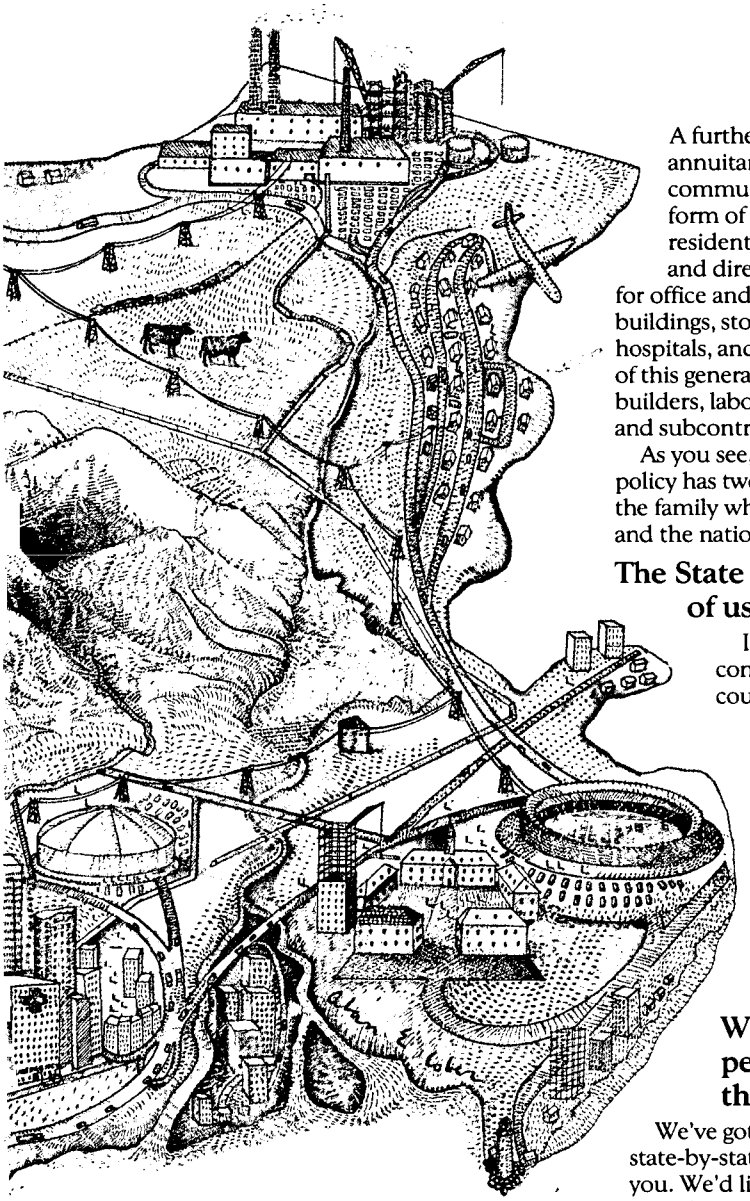
Great State On Any Map.



A further $250 billion of these policyholders' and annuitants' reserve funds are returned to communities in the form of commercial and residential mortgages and direct investments for office and industrial buildings, stores, homes, hospitals, and schools. All of this generates work for builders, laborers, suppliers, and subcontractors.

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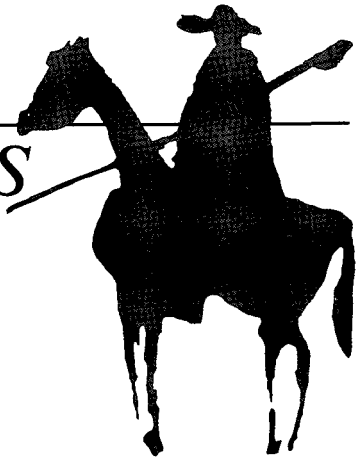
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



If you've ever been an enlisted man in the armed forces, you won't be surprised to learn that the death count on the *Iowa* was one officer and 46 guys like you. . . .

One of the most un-American distinctions made by the American government is the one that gives Social Security to people regardless of how much unearned income (from stocks, bonds, and other investments) they may have but reduces it if they earned income by working. They are, in other words, penalized for working and rewarded for not working. I don't think any of us should receive Social Security when we don't need it, so I approve of a means test. But if there is a work test, which I don't think there should be, it should favor those who work, not those who don't. . . .

To give you an idea of how the District of Columbia spends its public school budget, here are some titles of its employees. There's a "Community Coordinator" and a "Community Organizer," an "Attendance Aide," "Attendance Officer," and an "Attendance Counselor," an "Assistant for Research and Assessment" and an "Assistant for Research and Planning," an "Employee Counseling Assistant," an "Employee Counseling Specialist," an "Employee Development Specialist," an "Employee Relations Assistant," and an "Employee Relations Specialist," not to mention an "Interagency Liaison" and the clearly overworked "Position Classification Specialist.". . .

The any-knowledge-of-the-facts standard used to exclude jurors in the North case makes no sense at all. It, as almost everyone realizes, keeps interested, well-informed citizens off the jury. The standard should be: Is there the slightest suggestion that the juror's knowledge of the facts would cause him to be prejudiced for or against the defendant. . . .

One aspect of the North case needs much more publicity because if widely known, it could have a revolutionary impact on the executive branch of the government, especially on the Pentagon. It is the fact

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that North was charged with lying to Congress even though he was not under oath when he lied. North was astonished—"I didn't know it was illegal," he said—because practically everyone in the executive branch assumes he is free to mislead Congress when he is not testifying under oath. Lily gilding, if not outright lying, is rampant in nonsworn testimony. And it is worst of all from the military.

A solution to this problem that I have often recommended in these pages is to require all congressional testimony to be under oath. Another would be to post a copy of the statute—18 USC 1001—on the office wall of every executive branch employee. Here's how it reads:

"Whoever, in any manner within the jurisdiction of any department or agency of the United States, knowingly and willfully falsifies, conceals or covers up by any trick, scheme or device a material fact or makes any false, fictitious or fraudulent statements or representations. . . shall be fined not more than $10,000 or imprisoned not more than five years, or both."

If the bureaucrats were made to realize that they might be put in the pokey if they fail to adhere to the truth even when not under oath, Congress not only would be much better informed, it also could reduce its staff, which has grown enormously in the past 20 years. A significant factor in that growth has been the congressional distrust of information provided it by the executive branch, a distrust that took hold in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam. There is, for example, a congressional budget office that would be unnecessary if Congress could trust the OMB. . . .

By the way, the title of the person who responded to our request for job titles in the District public schools was Assistant to the Director, Classification and Wage Administration, Division of Human Resource Management, Office of Management Services, District of Columbia Public Schools. . . .

Thirty-six of 64 major Air Force bases operate at less than 50 percent of their capacity. The reason is that these bases were planned for the Air Force of the 1950s, in which planes played a much larger role than they do in today's world of missiles. This revelation was contained in a report prepared by the office of the assistant secretary of defense for program analysis and evaluation.

Why haven't you heard about it? Because the report, according to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, was squelched by the Air Force. It was prepared by one of the Pentagon's most respected analysts, Franklin C. Spinney. The response was a handwritten memo from General Larry D. Welch, the Air Force chief of staff, that said, "Chief wants to meet with person who wrote this study and his boss." It's a safe bet that the meeting did not involve the presentation of any medals. . . .

Aficionados of Watergate trivia, this one is for you. Guess where Haldeman's Haldeman, Larry Higby, has ended up? He's president of the

"STOP THEM DAMN PICTURES"

That's what "Boss" Tweed demanded when he saw the handwriting on the Hall (Tammany, that is). But the pictures didn't stop. "Boss" Tweed met his maker in the Ludlow Street Jail and Thomas Nast put bitingly eloquent political cartoons squarely and permanently in the middle of American political life. Tweed aside, we think Emerson had it right when he said, *"Caricatures are often the truest history of the times."*

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Los Angeles Times. The irony is that the *Times* did more Watergate reporting than any paper other than *The Washington Post*.

According to one theory of the burglary—John Dean's—Higby's role was crucial. Dean believes Haldeman's "tickler" system, of which Higby was in charge, was what made Jeb Magruder authorize the break-in at the Democratic National Committee. "Once a staff member was nailed with responsibility for the slightest project," Dean wrote in *Blind Ambition*, "the tickler would keep pestering until it was fed something." This meant that Magruder, who had been told to gather intelligence on the DNC and its chief, Larry O'Brien, was constantly being called by Higby and Gordon Strachan, who was Higby's Higby, and asked what he had found out. Finally, in desperation, he ordered the break-in. . . .

You read all those stories about how the teamsters were going to reform as a result of the March settlement of the government's racketeering suit against the union. Now consider this: One month later the Teamsters executive board appointed a new member, George Vitale, who has two convictions on his record, one of them for the embezzlement of union funds. . . .

I'm sure *The Washington Monthly* seems anti-union when we attack union corruption, wage increases without productivity increases, and the protection of incompetent workers from dismissal. But we also know that unions are sometimes necessary to protect workers from the greed of the bosses. A recent example comes from the Emhart Corporation of Farmington, Connecticut, which, finding itself the object of an unfriendly takeover, offered its workers as little as three months' wages as severance pay, while paying executives three *years'* salaries. . . .

"Three Airlines Say Profits Surged" read a headline a few weeks ago in *The New York Times*. If you've traveled lately, you know why. It's the larceny that monopoly power is enabling the airlines to get away with in setting their fares. I recently flew to Dallas from Washington on American Airlines. Since American dominates the route, it could charge more than $800 for a tourist-class roundtrip ticket on a journey that just a few years ago cost half that. . . .

In days gone by crooked doctors used to get kickbacks from the laboratories they selected to do their patients' work or from the other physicians to whom they referred the patient. The problem was that all this was illegal and might get the doctor in trouble. Then some clever fellow said, why don't we doctors get together and create our own labs and clinics. Then we will have no problem with the law, but the profits from the referrals will still come to us. And so it has come to pass that 12 percent of the doctors who treat Medicare patients refer them to laboratories and clinics in which the doctors have financial interests.

The catch for the rest of us is that patients of these physicians get an average of 45 percent more services than other Medicare patients. Guess who pays for these services? How does the profit the doctors receive from the lab or clinic differ morally from the kickback?. . .

James Watt used to warn us of the danger of being "lured by the crumbs of subsidies, entitlements, and giveaways—lured deep into the forest of government controls and regulation." I don't know how deep in that forest Mr. Watt is, but he certainly has taken more than a crumb of subsidy. Three hundred thousand dollars, to be exact. That's how much, we are now learning from the HUD scandals, he received for lobbying for approval of a subsidized housing project.

The HUD scandal not only unmasks Watt's hypocrisy but provides another piece of evidence of the corruption that pervaded the Reagan administration. . . .

There still may be hope for the future of higher education in America. Students are rebelling against the high costs and the low quality of a system that features lightweight courses and underworked professors and that rewards even shoddy research more than it does good teaching.

The rebels have formed a group called the National Organization of Undergraduates for Better Education and plan to hold a national conference at Syracuse University in October. . . .

West Virginia has found an effective way to discourage school dropouts. Those under 18 years of age who drop out or have more than 15 days of unexcused absences can be denied a license to drive or have their license suspended.

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The result has been reduction of the dropout rate—by 50 percent in one county. And more than 25 percent of the students who drop out are returning to their classes. . . .

The great mistake of tax reform was slashing the top rate to 28 percent. The last time it fell that low was in the 1920s, when Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover were the Reagan and Bush of their era. This is far too little to let the rich get away with and the American people know it.

A Louis Harris poll shows that 62 percent favor raising the tax rate for the wealthy from 28 to 38 percent. This sentiment was confirmed by a Gallup poll showing that 64 percent favor higher taxes on those making more than $80,000 a year and a poll for *Money* magazine that showed 69 percent favored raising taxes on those making more than $100,000 a year. This, as the columnist Kevin Phillips recently suggested, shows that the Democrats do not have to imitate the Republicans on tax policy, as many seem to think. . . .

The people who tell us not to worry about the deficit have at least one good argument. The savings rate is going up. This is because the baby boomers have stopped spending every dollar they make on BMWs and trips to Paris and have instead been buying government securities directly for themselves or indirectly through other investments such as certificates of deposit, thus increasing the funds available to finance the deficit. . . .

Another government agency that deserves the kind of praise we give the Office of Technology Assessment in this issue (page 38) is the National Transportation Safety Board. It investigates transportation mishaps such as the oil spill in Alaska and the fuselage that ripped off United Flight 811 from Honolulu. It has consistently done a good job of tracking down the causes of these accidents. The only problem is that it has no power to require compliance with the safety recommendations it makes. That power remains in the hands of notoriously spineless agencies like the FAA. . . .

For its January 30 story on America's Most Admired Corporations, *Fortune* magazine asked about 8,000 senior executives, outside directors, and financial analysts to rate companies they knew about on eight attributes of reputation. One was "community and environmental responsibility." Exxon made the top 10. What does it say about the rest of corporate America if Exxon is one of the best?

What kills me is that Exxon will get away with little or no real punishment. I had thought a boycott of its gasoline stations would do the trick. But I am told the only losers would be the station owners. Exxon itself could still peddle the gas, selling to other distributors, and come out fine. . . .

If you have ever been a politician, as I once was, you surely have known the daunting experience of arriving at a scheduled speaking engagement and finding only a handful of people assembled to hear your message instead of the large and enthusiastic crowd you had expected. Pulling yourself up for such occasions over a lifetime of public service creates a sticking-to-the-drill-through-thick-and-thin mindset that is unshakable. An illustration is provided by a story told me by a friend who recently retired from the Senate.

He learned that an older former senator, a gentleman famed for his mastery of the courtly etiquette and the flowery idiom of the upper chamber, was living in a home for the elderly not far from where my friend resides. My friend decided to go see his former colleague, and they arranged to meet for breakfast at the retirement home. There was one other person, an old lady, sitting at their table. This did not deter the senior senator from rising to introduce "my distinguished colleague from the great state of ---------, a tireless champion of the working man, an indomitable foe of oppression, a steadfast friend of Israel" and so on.

At the conclusion, the old lady clapped politely, and my friend felt there was nothing for him to do but respond in kind. So he, too, rose and proceeded to deliver a five-minute oration praising the senior senator, the retirement home, and "the excellent breakfast that has been laid before us this morning." The old lady had begun to look like she would prefer to be somewhere else, but still she summoned up the courtesy to applaud once again as my friend concluded his remarks. As they walked to the door, the senior senator thanked my friend for coming and said, "Next time, give me a little more notice and I'll try to arrange a better turnout.". . .

—*Charles Peters*

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Why Cable Costs Too Much

How local politicians and cable companies conspire to make cable TV overpriced

by John A. Barnes

In 1982, Sacramento, California became one of the last major metropolitan areas to decide to wire its residents for cable television. Assuming that cable was a "natural monopoly," similar to a public utility, Sacramento saw little reason not to copy the 5,000 other cities and counties across America and announce that it was accepting bids for a cable television "franchise." The lucky winner would have the right to provide cable service within the city and county of Sacramento in exchange for paying a "franchise fee" (which, as in most places, ran about 5 percent of revenues). Such franchise rights, in turn, would leave the company in control of a market that would generate revenues of about $60 million a year. That, at least, was the plan until a revolutionary new idea in cable economics—competition—rudely forced its way onto the Sacramento stage. This intrusion has left the nation's cable monopolists ill at ease and lent a bit of hope to the nation's cable consumers, who have been courted, then fleeced, from coast to coast. That's right, consumers—remember them?

Until the early 1960s, cable was little more than what it had been at its inception in the late 1940s: a way of bringing clear signals to poor reception areas, such as those in Pennsylvania's coal country. As cable operators began to add signals from distant viewing areas, however, broadcasters started to worry that their "exclusive" television licenses were being infringed upon. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which up to this point had pretty much ignored cable television, suddenly spewed forth regulations. Cable companies could carry only two stations in addition to local broadcasting stations. If a network affiliate in a top 50 market bought the rights to, say, "Hogan's Heroes," the cable company could not import a signal from another station that also showed "Hogan's Heroes." Cable stations could not show movies that were less than three years old or more than 10. They could not produce their own programming. And on and on.

The federal barriers to cable operation began to erode with a series of court and FCC decisions in the 1970s, and by the early eighties most of these regulatory inanities had been removed. Once the feds were out of the way, however, and cable was ready to show what it could do, another gatekeeper appeared: local government.

When the average American politician spies the chance to regulate a public franchise, his soul begins to sing, because life's experience has shown that such power easily leads to enrichment, either through new campaign contributions from those anxious for his favor or from the more direct solicitations known as graft. This has been the case with everything from liquor licenses to race tracks, and so it was with cable. The local politicians quickly set out to rationalize their role.

The normal law of economics, that competition between suppliers keeps prices low and the level of service high, simply did not apply to cable television, they argued. Powerful economies of scale made cable a "natural monopoly." Cable companies had

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to dig up city streets and make their way into people's homes; flat-out competition for something this large and intrusive was simply uneconomical. Moreover, the politicians argued, left to their own devices the cable operators would bypass poorer neighborhoods. It was therefore incumbent upon local politicians to choose one supplier that would offer the best deal for consumers.

While cities could offer licenses to operate, there's one thing they couldn't do: regulate prices. A 1984 federal deregulation act stripped them of that right. This left consumers with the worst of both worlds. Having set up effective monopolies in what is now a $14.5 billion industry, city governments were powerless to control the resulting prices. For the cable companies it became a situation of gouge-as-gouge-can. Nationally, the price for cable service rose about 32 percent from 1984 to 1988. In Washington, D.C., families with young children now have to pay $33 a month for full service—or risk leaving their kids with a complex from being the only ones on the block without the Disney channel. As prices skyrocketed, city councils were forced to resort to impotent resolutions of protest. But they could harrumph all they liked as far as the cable operators were concerned; if a cable monopoly wasn't exactly a license to print money, it was the next best thing.

Congress is scheduled to hold hearings this summer to investigate the charge of price-gouging, and legislators have begun to wonder whether the 1984 deregulation should be reversed. That means that government may again muck things up. The problem isn't that there's been too much deregulation but that there hasn't been enough. And the answer isn't government price-setting, it's competition.

Whispers and bribes

Cynics may suspect that the politicians who concocted the current system had more than the public interest in mind. The benefits to the politicians? They could shake down potential cable operators for hefty campaign contributions. Their stretched city budgets could be replenished with "franchise fees." Community groups could demand that franchises build elaborate "public access" studios for local programming, often starring—surprise!—the groups and the politicians themselves.

It's not just politicians who benefit from the monopolies but the politicians' well-connected friends too. The properly connected found themselves being offered cable stock by bidders in exchange for the right words whispered in the right ears. In Denver in 1982, one city councilwoman said that the only person she knew who didn't own cable stock was the coach of her son's little league team. Then again, he didn't live in Denver.

Investigations by the FBI and local district attorneys have revealed widespread corruption in the cable industry, from its beginnings to the present. In the mid-1970s Irving Kahn, head of TelePrompter, a pioneer in the cable industry, went to federal prison for trying to bribe the mayor of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Allegations of cable corruption were

> Before the contracts are signed, there is precious little a cable operator won't promise.

part of the problem for Donald Manes, the Queens borough president who killed himself while under investigation. A recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial, quoting court papers, drew this portrait of a 1982 meeting between Manes and a cable executive: "Fearing the room was bugged, Manes tried unsuccessfully to communicate through hand gestures and lip movements his desire for a bribe." (Areas of America still without cable might try this pantomime as a parlor game, "Name that Bribe.") In Sacramento, the man who chaired the Metropolitan Cable Commission when the monopoly contract was awarded, William M. Bryan, is himself now on trial in federal court for bribery. Prosecutors say Bryan attempted to steer a contract to a cable businessman in exchange for a $150,000 line of credit. In sentencing a Washington lawyer to jail in 1985, Federal District Judge Susan Getzendanner commented, "I think it was a bribe, and apparently what goes on in the cable industry all the time."

"Influence peddling"

Back now to Sacramento, and the unraveling of this seamy system:

After much lobbying, the franchise contract first went to the United Tribune Cable Company, in 1982. Though the company had seemed eager to promise the world in exchange for the franchise, subsequently

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it balked at some of its extravagant pledges, such as planting 20,000 trees in the area. United Tribune dropped out. The bidding was reopened.

One of the bidders was River City Cable Company, formed by a group of 73 local investors—whom the press later dubbed the "Gang of 73"—each making $2,000 investments. None of the people involved with River City had the least experience in running a cable television company, and $146,000 in working capital isn't much for starting one. But they had something more important: clout. The Gang of 73 was a Who's Who of Sacramento's politically powerful and well-connected, including Michael Deaver and a sitting federal district judge. Each investor was told by the organizers of the venture that they stood to realize a profit of as much as $120,000 or more by the mid-1990s, according to subsequent trial testimony. To actually run the system, the shell that called itself River City Cable teamed up with Scripps-Howard Broadcasting to form Sacramento Cable Television; the Gang of 73 owned 5 percent of this corporation. The combination of clout and capability worked. In 1983, Sacramento Cable was selected over four other bidders by the Sacramento Metropolitan Cable Commission to run the local system. All seemed smooth sailing.

One man who wasn't satisfied, however, was Rod Hansen, president of Pacific West Cable and one of the unsuccessful bidders. All he had was a cable company—no Gang of 73. He decided to apply to operate a second cable system in the city. "[The cable commission] told me that I was wasting my time," Hansen says. "When I persisted, they said I would have to put up a $40,000 nonrefundable deposit and all this other stuff. And even if I did that, they still told me my chances were nonexistent."

Had Hansen accepted that answer, that's where things would have ended. Instead, he got in touch with Harold Farrow, a noted First Amendment lawyer in Oakland. Hansen filed suit in 1983 charging that the city and county of Sacramento had violated his First Amendment rights of free speech by awarding what amounted to a monopoly to one company. Farrow argued that the process of granting cable franchises was akin to "the business of licensing the press that we thought we were done with a couple of hundred years ago."

It took four years for the case to come to trial in federal district court, but when the jury ruled, the whole cable television industry sat up and took notice. The judge asked the jury for certain findings of fact. The answers shocked the defendants.

Question: "Was the 'natural monopoly' argument a sham by defendants (city and county) to obtain increased campaign contributions for local elected officials?"

Answer: "Yes."

Question: "Were defendants motivated to provide such benefits (public access channels and other community grants) by either a desire to obtain increased political influence for elected or appointed local officials or a desire to favor local officials' political supporters?"

Answer: "Yes."

Jurors later told local press that it was the "influence peddling" by the Gang of 73 that had obtained the franchise for Sacramento Cable. "We felt the way the whole thing was written up was to exclude competition and it had to do with this Gang of 73," juror Judith Mosier told the *Sacramento Bee*.

Wire the poor

This unexpected defeat was so total that the city and county did not even bother to appeal the jury verdict. Instead, the cable commission immediately rewrote its ordinance to allow free competition, requiring applicants only to obtain a license and bond from the government before tearing up the streets. Subsequently *two* other companies entered the fray—Hansen's Pacific West and Cable AmeriCal, which Sacramento Cable eventually bought out for $11 million.

One of the most frequently repeated arguments in favor of franchising is that without the guaranteed profits that come with a monopoly, no cable company would provide service to the poorest neighborhoods. Fewer poor people would buy the service, and they would default more often than their more prosperous neighbors—or so the theory went. Sacramento Cable set out to make this a self-fulfilling prophecy when, upon losing its monopoly status, it announced it was dropping plans to wire the low-income neighborhood of Oak Park. But a storm of public protest caused Sacramento Cable to reverse its decision. At the same time, Pacific West applied for a license to wire Oak Park, too. So it is supremely ironic that one of the city's lowest-income sections is likely to be one of the first in the area with competing cable systems.

The poor-will-suffer theory of cable monopoly was flawed anyway—poor people tend to watch television more avidly than others, making poor neighborhoods ripe markets. And the bunching of homes close together makes them cheaper to wire. In fact it's the poor who often subsidize service to affluent suburbs, which pay the same rates even though the distance between homes makes them more expensive to reach.

Competition brought another boon to Sacramento consumers: cheaper prices. As part of the settle-

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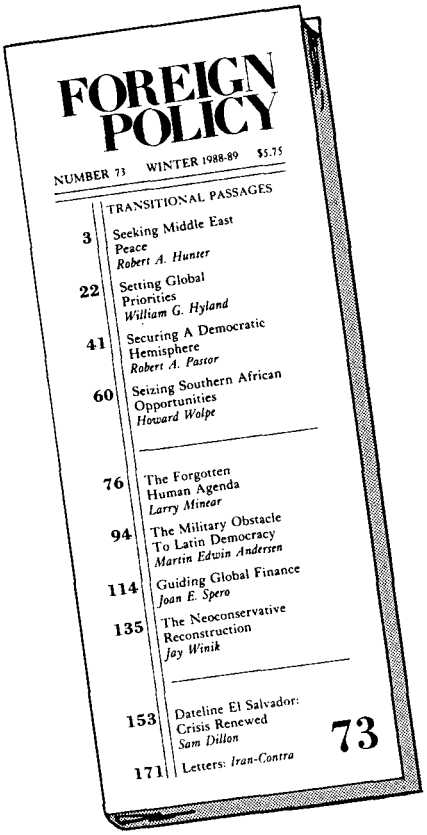
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ment of a lawsuit by the city against Sacramento Cable for various non-payments, the company won the right to charge different rates in different neighborhoods, something the franchise agreement had prohibited. A few months after raising its rates to $16.50 for basic service, Sacramento Cable turned around and waived installation fees, offered several months of free viewing, and matched Pacific West's price of $13.50—but only, of course, in those areas where Pacific West had begun stringing cable. None of this solicitous behavior was on display in neighborhoods where Sacramento Cable still had its monopoly.

Windbags and trees

Citizens seem to accept the "natural monopoly" argument with surprising alacrity. If cable is such a "natural monopoly," then why would city and state governments—not to mention companies with a franchise—go to such extraordinary lengths to enforce this supposed law of economics? As Rod Hansen and Pacific West were making progress in the Sacramento lawsuit, other cable operators made a beeline for the state capitol. They got legislation passed in both chambers to give local officials the authority to bar competitors on the grounds of—what else?—"the public interest." Governor George Deukmejian vetoed the bill.

The same kind of lobbying to bolster this "natural monopoly" with unnatural help has occurred across the country. The city of New York spent years trying (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) to prevent an independent satellite cable provider from operating in Co-op City, the world's largest private apartment complex. Similarly, Dallas tried unsuccessfully to prevent a satellite provider from competing with its local franchised cable firm. Don Barden, who holds the Detroit franchise, includes a clause in his contracts that forbids his customers from contracting with any other operator, including satellite reception services (or so-called "wireless cable").

But doesn't a contract with a franchise provide guarantees that consumers wouldn't have if they simply took their chances on whoever came in? This is one of the first arguments employed by the monopolists. It is also one of the most bogus. Before the contracts are signed, there is precious little a cable operator won't promise. They pledge gargantuan systems of 120 channels (less than half of which are generally used). Sacramento had its infamous 20,000 trees. Miami forced its franchise holder to finance a drug rehabilitation program. One of the favorite scams are the so-called "public access" channels. These are meant to appeal to a democratic dream—local studios providing talk shows and other programming on local issues. In reality, they typically become flatulence forums for windbag politicians, attracting little viewer interest.

Where cable operators have managed to keep their monopolistic grip, consumers have paid the price. Thomas Hazlett, a professor of economics at the University of California at Davis who has testified as an expert witness in numerous anti-franchising lawsuits, estimates that all the "bells and whistles" promised in order to win the franchise probably add 20 to 30 percent to the average customer's bill. "If a typical cable consumer pays $25 a month for basic service and a premium channel," he says, "at least $5 to $7 of that results from politically imposed costs, most of which is pure waste. . . . [a] dollar so the mayor and his friends can have their own talk shows that nobody watches, and on and on."

> When the average American politician spies the chance to regulate a franchise, his soul begins to sing.

Promise-the-moon is the m.o. only until the ink dries. The next step is equally predictable: once the franchise is awarded, the lucky winner shuffles sheepishly back to the city and admits that many of the promises were, financially speaking, quite unrealistic. The "giveback" negotiations then get underway. In a study of the 30 largest markets in the country, Hazlett found that 21 of them had acceded to givebacks. In eight of those instances, the givebacks occurred before a single home was wired.

Speedy hookups, anyone? The city of Washington, D.C. began its franchising process in 1982, and the city is still less than half wired. Meanwhile, suburbs of San Diego, Phoenix, and parts of Fairfax, Virginia—some of the few areas of the country that did not bother with franchising—got their MTV faster than their neighbors, who enjoyed the "protection" of the monopoly system.

Keeping cable honest

In contrast to the sordid record left by cable monopolists are a few examples of communities willing to allow competition. Their experience shows

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how well it works. From 1971 to 1984, the residents of Bryan and College Station, Texas enjoyed direct competition for viewers, and customers saw their cable rates drop to the lowest in the state. In March 1986, the city of Huntsville gave a company called Cable Alabama, which had been operating in surrounding Madison County, permission to compete with Group W, the franchise holder. Residents had frequently complained about Group W's service and price—$10.45 a month for 12 channels. Cable Alabama offered 50 channels for $8.95 a month—more than four times as many channels for less money.

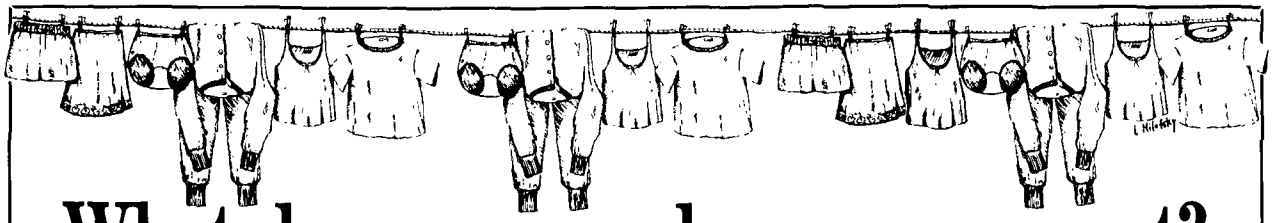
UA/Columbia and Cablevision of New Jersey have been the competitors in Hillsdale and Paramus, New Jersey for a decade now. Borough Clerk Elizabeth Roter says the situation results in high awareness among the residents of cable rates between the two companies. A recent promotion campaign had both companies reducing charges to $9.95 a month, and both often offer reduced installation charges.

Probably the best known competition success story is Allentown, Pennsylvania, which has about 150,000 subscribers. Two companies, Service Electric and Twin County Cable, have provided state-of-the-art service to the residents since the early 1960s. Joe Rosenfeld, Allentown's cable administrator, says the two companies are keen competitors. Complaints are few, he says, and if people are dissatisfied, they usually just switch companies.

Even if competition doesn't actually take place, or eventually comes to an end, the mere prospect of it can have remarkable effects. The residents of Presque Isle, Maine complained about their small (12 channel) cable service for a long time. The city government finally announced plans to bring in a competitor. The franchise holder almost immediately upgraded to a 54 channel system.

Instead of allowing cities and counties to regulate cable rates, Congress should simply forbid franchising. There is no reason a cable operator cannot be treated under the law in exactly the same way as any developer who wants to build a house or an office building. He applies for a right of way to use the necessary public property and posts a bond to cover any damages incurred while ripping up streets or stringing wire along telephone poles.

Decades of Cable Monopoly have put franchise holders on Park Place, sent local officials directly to jail, and left hapless consumers with Virginia Avenue service. Time for a new game: free enterprise. □



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The Case for the Case Study

What Imelda Marcos, Nikita Khrushchev, and Niccolo Machiavelli could teach the American Political Science Association

by Suzanne Goldsmith and Katherine Boo

In a classroom of graduate students in Harvard's department of government, students hunch over spiral notebooks, copying down terms from a lecture. "Theoretical linking structure." "Criterion of falsifiability." A professor, book in hand, reads a passage on the fallacy of falsification. "I remember the feeling I had when I first read this," he says, rhapsodically, "the feeling of scales falling from my eyes."

He scans the room. No scales falling here. One student has his open textbook propped up against the table. Nestled inside it is a book of comic strips. He turns a page discreetly.

Welcome to the world of quantitative theory, the preeminent discipline in university departments of political science. Combining mathematical modeling and sophisticated statistical analysis, quantitative theory tests hypotheses and derives principles for political behavior. "This is theory," emphasizes the professor, "as opposed to common sense."

In another classroom across the Cambridge campus, apostates hold a different sort of service. A student in the front row has been waving her hand since class began. The professor, pacing three rows back, finally swings around and points. "You. You're OMB." She smiles. "A hundred-and-thirty-five million dollars per expected life saved is too much," she says. "I'm not gonna pay it."

The classroom becomes a sea of hands. The professor hustles back and forth, barking questions, rapping on desks: You're Ford. The election is three months from tomorrow. What do you do? The subject is the swine flu vaccine. The students, mid-level federal bureaucrats in real life, are now cabinet members and agency directors, fighting out alternatives, discussing consequences, compromising, caucusing, and consolidating power. And while they're arguing the particulars of flu strains and campaign decisions, they're learning something enduring: the anatomy of political decision-making. The tool of this impressive trade? It's called the case study.

Within a political science establishment that emphasizes statistics and theoretical modeling, the case study is widely regarded as a poor relation. At the Kennedy School, its basic unit of currency is a 15- to 20-page paper that spells out the facts relevant to an actual event in government or politics, emphasizing the personalities of both the people and bureaucracies involved. Of course, many topics demand case studies of book length—Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*, her tremendously insightful account of the origins of World War I, is but one example. What case studies have in common isn't length but the ability to recreate the historical moment, in all its complexity and idiosyncrasy.

Suzanne Goldsmith is a reporter for the Quincy Patriot Ledger. *Katherine Boo is a Washington writer.*

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At the Kennedy School, the case study is a hit. The Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, the National League of Cities, and other organizations have contributed millions to fund the development of new cases. And each year, nearly a thousand government professionals make the pilgrimage to Cambridge to hear Richard Neustadt, Ernest May, and other case-study gurus lead the arguments over Reagan and Lebanon, AIDS and the insurance industry, and other issues in American policy, prominent and obscure.

While the case study has flourished at the Kennedy School, its true and tremendous potential remains untapped. The American Council on Education, the nation's largest higher-education trade organization, collects information on many forms of teaching; but not the case study. Out of the dozens of scholarly journals in the field of political science, none reviews case studies. No journal publishes them; no organization of advocates exists. "People aren't looking at the case study method much," says Jerry Stohler, of the American Educational Research Association, the country's leading organization for research on teaching techniques. "It's not what you'd call a big issue."

That oversight *is* what you'd call a big issue. The case study has the ability to rescue political science, and much of history, from the dreary quantification and abstraction that have befogged it. In many professional disciplines, including law, business, and medicine, the idea of educating students without the case study would be be unfathomable. But the case study methodology needn't be reserved for professional school. Used wisely, it can inject sex appeal into government studies not only at the undergraduate level but even in high schools. The case study method can be adapted to teach virtually *any* lesson from political science and history—how wars start, how labor movements win, where good intentions can go awry. But the case study's most important message may be its most subtle—the idea that individuals matter. Case studies drive home, the way that mathematical modeling cannot, the complex interplay between personality and institutional culture that shapes politics and drives human events.

A quick look at the latest figures on voter turnout or cultural literacy emphasizes the need for the case study. Are these the people you want electing your next president? (Or staffing your local government?) Finding better ways to teach chemistry produces better chemists; finding better ways to teach politics and history makes better democracy.

The bureaucrats' tap dance

You. You're John Kennedy. It's October 16, 1962, and you've just had a really lousy morning. At 8:45 a.m. McGeorge Bundy, the national security adviser, barreled into your bedroom with bad news: aerial reconnaissance photos show launch sites for medium-range nuclear missiles being installed by the Soviets 90 miles off the Florida coast, in Cuba.

> The case study has the potential to rescue political science from the dreary quantification and abstraction that have befogged it.

The Kennedy administration's handling of the Cuban missile crisis (and how it differed from the Bay of Pigs) is probably the most famous of the Harvard case studies. It illustrates the nuances of the exercise of power that cases, at their best, can reveal. One important reason for the administration's earlier disaster at the Bay of Pigs, the president now realized, was the excessive trust he had placed in the chain of command. When Richard Bissell, the CIA's deputy director for planning, confidently promised that wholesale numbers of Cuban discontents would break ranks and fight Castro as soon as the invasion force landed, the leaders of the new administration bought it. Subtle warnings existed, but the president didn't know how to read them. So when the Joint Chiefs wrote in a memo that the invasion had "a fair chance" of succeeding, Kennedy took it as an endorsement. In fact that tip-toe language was simply part of a bureaucratic dance intended to avoid offending the CIA: the service chiefs later explained that they were trying to warn of three-to-one odds *against* the invasion's success. Though a former war hero himself, Kennedy later told Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. that he had deferred to the military mystique. "If someone comes in to tell me this or that about the minimum wage bill, I have no hesitation in overruling them," he said. "But you always assume that the military and intelligence people have some secret still not available to ordinary mortals."

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By the time of the missile crisis 18 months later, Kennedy had become more savvy about bureaucratic self-interest. He had also, as it happens, been reading Tuchman's *The Guns of August*, which illumines the dangers of reading the wrong signals from one's opponents. With Tuchman's account of World War I in mind, Kennedy, determined to do all he could to avoid war, was encouraged to seek friendly factions in the Kremlin and to scrutinize the most hawkish ones in his own bureaucracy. In convening a special Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm), he found a way to balance the bureaucracy's advice with that of outsiders whose judgment he valued. Among them, for example, was Robert Lovett, the former Truman defense secretary (and a registered Republican). When Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and an esteemed Kennedy advisor, urged a surgical strike against the missiles, it was Lovett, himself once a navy flier, who reminded everyone how unsurgical airstrikes tend to be. Another ExComm member who made an important contribution was Llewellyn Thompson, an experienced diplomat with a feel for the rivalries within the Kremlin. When the Soviets shot down an American surveillance plane during the crisis, many of Kennedy's advisors saw the move as a conscious elevation of hostility; Thompson advised that it was probably just the Soviet military—a bureaucracy as hidebound as any—following its routine. And the most important outsider of all, of course, was Robert Kennedy, who, as attorney general, had no foreign policy or defense credentials, but who brought to the table brains and a freedom from institutional loyalties. Robert Kennedy played a pivotal role, both in arguing for a blockade instead of an airstrike and in conducting the secret negotiations with Anatoly Dobyrnin that assured the Soviets of the subsequent removal of American missiles in Turkey.

> The missile crisis combines two of the case study's best attributes: excitement and nuance.

The administration's sensitivity to organizational behavior served it well as the crisis peaked. Two puzzling cables from the Kremlin arrived—one, long and rambling, seemed to accede to the demand to withdraw the missiles; the other, terse and official, appeared to retract that offer. What to do? Realizing that the different cables could reflect different Soviet power blocs, Kennedy simply ignored the second and responded to the first. The next day, Khrushchev agreed, and the world's closest brush with full-scale nuclear war was over.

Staying awake

The missile crisis combines two of the case study method's best attributes: excitement and nuance. "Part of what I'm trying to do is to teach them about institutions and how they actually work," says Fritz Mayer, a former case-study instructor at Harvard who now teaches public policy at Duke. "The problem with the quantitative approach is that it misses some of the subtlety, some of the flavor, of real politics." In class, students will sometimes join a role-playing exercise, in which they'll defend a point of view from the personal and institutional perspective of the actual people involved. "It's a high-pressure situation," says James Lieber, a master's student at the Kennedy School. "There's a lot of information coming in. There are very serious people representing very different positions, ranging from the joint chiefs to the attorney general."

You don't need the world poised on the brink of nuclear war in order to have an effective case study. One of Lieber's favorites is an examination of racial politics in suburban Cleveland. Specifically, the case revolves around the decision faced by the Ohio Housing Finance Agency over whether to finance a program meant to promote integration in Shaker Heights. Aimed at preventing the racial "tipping" of neighborhoods, it provided low-interest loans for whites buying in black neighborhoods, and, to a lesser extent, blacks buying in white neighborhoods.

"Suppose I say this is a great policy because it preserves integrated neighborhoods," Lieber says. "And somebody else looks at me and says, 'And some bunch of white people has decided how many black people it's okay to have in a neighborhood, and then they'll steer them someplace else. You are in effect dispersing a black power base before it can consolidate, so you can't elect black political representatives.'

"So all of a sudden," Lieber says, "I feel confused—how can I seek integration without do-

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR FINANCE

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER
415 12TH STREET, N.W. ROOM 412
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

FEB 6 1989

MEMORANDUM

TO: AGENCY DIRECTORS AND HEADS OF INDEPENDENT AGENCIES

FROM: N. Anthony Calhoun
D.C. Controller

SUBJECT: Two Percent Lump Sum Payment

The following is submitted to clarify any confusion related the two percent lump sum payment to District Service and Wage Service employees, per Mayor's Order 89-19.

"...Effective the pay period that contains January 15, 1989, employees paid from the District Service and Wage Service salary schedules and in a pay status during the first pay period beginning on or after October 1, 1988 through the pay period containing January 15, 1989, shall receive a one-time, non-annualizing lump sum payment of two percent computed off the salary schedule in effect the pay period containing January 15, 1989..."

Although the pay period containing January 15, 1989 ended on January 28, 1989 it is only after we have received and processed these timesheets (for payroll issuance during the week of February 6 - 10, 1989) can we identify those employees on board as of January 15, 1989. Computations will begin on February 13, 1989 and will take approximately three weeks to complete. Our projected pay date for the lump sum payment is the week of March 6, 1989.

I would appreciate your distributing this memorandum to the employees within your agency.

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ing all this stuff that this other person has said is racist? Analysis of these things frequently reveals ramifications that people hadn't seen earlier."

Other examples that have gained students' enthusiastic endorsement:

► Should the government finance kidney dialysis for everyone who needs it? "You had two students screaming at each other," says Sandeep Puri, a Kennedy School graduate. "This topic segued into another: the whole issue of whether to legalize laetrile, which became a discussion of paternalism, actually—when do you relax John Stuart Mill's absolute prohibition against paternalism. What about cigarettes and alcohol?"

► Why did the neutron bomb meet with such a political stomping? "You could see huge institutional forces at work," says Bruce Auster, another Kennedy School graduate. "The president had antidetente forces haranguing him, and then *The Washington Post* describes the weapon as one that kills people but not buildings, and that plays into all kinds of psychological concerns that the Europeans had about becoming the next battlefield.

"One aspect of it is that it's a very active method," Auster says. "You're not being told things. You're contributing."

"I'll be candid," says Suneel Ratan, a Kennedy School student. "A lot of times around here you're functioning on four hours' sleep. In some of the classes where a teacher is drawing a graph on a board, I've had trouble staying awake. I haven't had that problem in the case study classes."

Cheerleaders and higher math

You. You're an undergraduate studying political science at a Hot College. The odds are pretty good that you'll glide right through school without studying much history. (And much of the history that you do study has the same theoretical pretensions as political science.) Nor will you get much sense of the institutional context of political power. The most recent survey by the American Political Science Association of undergraduate political science departments shows that fewer than one-fifth require their majors to take a single course in public policy or administration. A study by Dean McHenry, a political scientist, reported that only a sixth of the nation's graduate-level core courses in comparative politics had syllabi that include such essentials as "bureaucracy" or "administration."

The lack of politics in political science is old news. Once upon a time, of course, political science was dominated by what today's social scientists call the "participant-observer": men like Hobbes, Machiavelli, Madison, and Jefferson, who knew little about regression analysis and much about the workings of power. In the beginning of the twentieth century, as the modern discipline evolved, early political scientists divided into roughly two groups. One was an intellectually soft form of civics, a cheerleading exercise meant to encourage students to participate in politics. The other took its cues from scientific disciplines that were winning increasing prestige. Darwin had found the science behind evolution, Freud the science of the mind—was there not a science of politics waiting to be unveiled? Science-envy grew even stronger in the postwar years, as political thinkers wanted to enjoy the same status accorded physicists, who had unlocked the secrets of nuclear explosions, and Keynesians, who claimed to have divined the quantifiable principles of economic behavior. Doting on actual political experience seemed outmoded and "soft."

While scientific supremacy has begun to retreat in recent years, the mass migration of academics in the 1970s toward quantifiable subjects continues to echo. (Tenure helps keep the dons of quantification entrenched.) Coming unaware upon the *American Political Science Review*, the preeminent journal in the field, one would be forgiven for mistaking it for a journal of higher math. How much support can an incumbent expect when running for reelection to the U.S. Senate? The "Incumbent Support Model," featured in a 1988 issue, provides a handy formula—$IV = a + b1P + b2I + b3cd + b4d + b5s + b6c + b7b + b8pc + b9pm + b10i\$ + b11cps + b12cc + b13c\$ + b14npc + b15mt + e$—to conclude that the guy with the most money gets the most votes. Most of the time, that is. What you won't find in the journal, however, is an analysis of some of the seminal political issues of the decade: Iran-contra, the Reagan military build-up, terrorism in the Middle East. Between 1973 and 1975 not a single article on Watergate or Vietnam was published there.

Tenure track flak

Of course, *bad* case studies can be just as much of a dead end as the worst computer models. The success of the case study method depends both on having quality studies and having skilled teachers to tease out the right lessons. You do need to understand trends and employ analysis; statistics and quantifiable data can be important. The best cases—and the best case study instructors—know how to marry the flesh and blood of actual occurrence with the proper analysis.

Ironically, the Kennedy School has been both a pioneer of the case study method, with all its potential to explore broad lessons of politics, and a bastion of narrow and quantitative practice. (See "Harvard vs. Democracy," by Jonathan Alter, March 1983.) While the quantifiers who have helped earn

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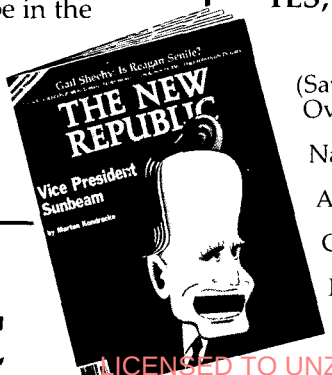

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THE MINDS THAT MATTER

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the school its reputation as a "temple of technocracy" also use cases, they often employ them in a narrow and managerial way. "Too often in Kennedy School case studies, students aren't encouraged to ask: Is this right? Is it wrong?," says Bruce Auster. "Instead they're left to do what's considered bureaucratically realistic. Cases had you define three options and encouraged you to pick the middle road."

> While the case study has flourished at the Kennedy School, its true and tremendous potential remains untapped.

Today, a civil war of sorts is being waged between cliques of Kennedy School faculty. On the one hand are those who continue to emphasize the technical skills of being a civil servant. In opposition are faculty members who want the curriculum to pay more attention to the rough and tumble of actual politics, to immerse students in the nature of political situations. Though members of either faction might enlist case studies in their cause, it's the latter—those who understand politics to be imprecise rather than scientific—who can wring the fullest value from the cases. Credit the Kennedy School for making better use of case studies than most other places; but keep in mind that even at the Kennedy School their full potential remains untapped.

Throughout the country, the system of academic reward and punishment offers case study practitioners little of the former and much of the latter. In the world of publish-or-perish, academic incentives promote technical research, not effective teaching. Given the academic's need to publish, political scientists who venture away from mathematical modeling may be venturing away from the tenure track, too. "Just because writing and teaching cases seems to be a good way to convey knowledge doesn't necessarily mean that people are going to write them," says Richard Ellmore, professor of educational administration and adjunct professor of political science at Michigan State. "It has to be part of the reward structure. Since [writing case studies] is down on the list of things that you get credit for doing, most people will do other work first."

Blood for kids

The incentives aren't much better at the high school level, where case studies could enliven texts that are as bloodless as those typically used in college. Science envy, it seems, trickles down. High school texts spice up their commentary with allusions to "situational factors," "probability sampling," and "solidarity groups." In the literature of education reform, scathing critiques of high-school civics texts are abundant: "superficial and uninspired," says Ernest Boyer in his reform-minded *High School.* "Students are not even beginning to have an understanding of the institutions that govern us."

The vogue in high school teaching now is "coverage," a dash past important dates, places, and people that leaves little time for sustained inquiry. This trend is driven by the elevation of test scores (usually from multiple-choice tests) as a way of judging a school district's success. And as merit pay gains acceptance, failure to teach the test can affect a teacher's pocketbook too. Alan Lockwood of the University of Wisconsin, author of one of the few existing high school texts based on the case method, was turned down by a half dozen commercial textbook publishers before Columbia Teacher's College decided to bring out his book. While a popular high school textbook might sell 10 million copies, Lockwood's has sold 25,000 since 1985. "They all said, 'This is great stuff, but we can't take the economic chance,'" Lockwood says. "It's extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any author of case studies to get major commercial publishers to handle them."

One bit of good news comes from California—which accounts for about 10 percent of the national school textbook market. Bill Honig, the state's innovative superintendent of schools, recently announced plans for a major overhaul of social studies, involving grades K through 12, with a new emphasis on—that's right—case studies. Honig said California is promoting a new curriculum because history had grown too "conceptual. Kids need the specifics: time, place, and people."

"You can say to the kid, 'You argue for England's position after the French-American war,'" Honig says. "You say, 'We just fought a war to protect

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you—shouldn't you pay some of the costs?' What you're making the person do is understand the facts and argue the rationales back and forth."

A case of Cory

You. Put down that Incumbent Support Model. You're a student in Marvin Kalb's Kennedy School course on the press and politics, reading case study # C16-88-868.0, The Fall of Marcos. The case, a 25-page paper, sets the dictator's 1986 downfall in context, describing the history of U.S.-Filipino friendship, the exile and assassination of Benigno Aquino, and Marcos's announcement of a "snap election" on the David Brinkley show. The case has wide applicability—its author, William Kline, suggests that it be taught in conjunction with a similar look at the fall of the Shah (a despot's demise with less happy consequences) to probe the workings of U.S. foreign policy.

But that's not Kalb's main purpose. He spends 15 minutes adding details to the historical context that the case doesn't mention, says Suneel Ratan, one of Kalb's students, "then he said, 'Okay guys, why was there so much coverage in America of Aquino's assassination. After all, this guy's only an opposition leader in a foreign country.'

"The first reason that someone tossed out was the obvious one—the history of close ties. Then someone else said they speak English. And then someone said, 'Look at Aquino—when he was banished, he came to Harvard and he made lots of friends among the American intelligentsia. A lot of those influential Americans are also members of the press—when he died, they jumped on it, or got their friends to jump on it.'" To Ratan, the most memorable part of the case is the fact that Marcos chose the David Brinkley show to announce the election—an indication, he said, of Marcos's contempt for his own people. "I mean, on the David Brinkley show!"

Beth Knoble, a Harvard student working on a doctorate in politics and the media, said that as a result of Kalb's class, she thought of Marcos's attempts to appeal to the U.S. media during Gorbachev's visit to the U.S. "Look at when Gorbachev was in Washington and he stopped on Connecticut Avenue to shake hands," she says. "That was a real media ploy. Doing cases makes you much more aware of what politicians do for policy and what they do for politics.

"They really give students a chance to get into people's minds," she says. "It's a very effective way to teach." □

The Worst City Government

With the District ranking dead last in the nation's drop-out ratings, a full 45 percent of D.C. highschoolers hit the streets without diplomas—about 10,000 kids a year. What's been the District's response? In April, eight months into a federally funded program to encourage attendance, the city had spent only $393.41 of its $395,000 grant. And that, of course, was on administrative expenses....

District residents may find comfort, however, in the fact that they don't live in Chicago, where on an average day more than 5,700 public school students attend classes with no teachers—not even substitutes. And while the headquarters of the Board of Education gleams after a $22 million face lift, school budgets are so low that one elementary school rations its paper and paste on a yearly supply budget of $600—less than a quarter of what the central office pays a private company to water its plants.

One thing you can't say about the Chicago schools, though, is that the school board president doesn't know what he's doing. He sent his kids to private schools....

—Katherine Boo

The D.C. school system, with spending levels 51 percent above the national average, had a $5.4 million deficit last year. This led to proposed cuts in summer school programs, textbooks, and supplies, as well as threats to lay off teachers. It didn't, however, lead to any action on an empty warehouse for which the school board pays $1,000 a day. Since April 1, 1988, the school board has spent more than $400,000 on the empty building. Leased to store school records, the facility has remained padlocked and strewn with garbage....

—Mark Feldstein

Atlanta, the city that boasts of being "too busy to hate" has also been too busy to file a $15 incorporation fee—even though that's all it takes to get access to $185,000 lying dormant in a bank account. The money belongs to the Atlanta Children's Foundation, which was founded in 1981 as the city emerged from its missing and murdered children's crisis. By 1988, the foundation had gone unattended for so long that its managers at Economic Opportunity Atlanta, a quasi-governmental agency, had forgotten to file the incorporation fee three years running, dissolving the foundation without even noticing. Why now the renewed attention? EOA decided to dip into the fund to lend itself $50,000—interest free....

—Jim Newton

Please send nominations to:
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The $5,347 Rock

How I almost sold the Pentagon a Manually Launched, Visually Guided, Igneous Antitank Weapon

by Jerome Richard

On September 30, 1987, a story appeared in *The Seattle Times* that told of problems the General Accounting Office identified with the Army's new M72A3 anti-tank weapon, a shoulder-mounted bazooka. "A battlefield GI has only one chance in ten of hitting his target" with this weapon according to the story. Worse, even if he hit his target, "the odds are it won't do any damage to a tank but will only expose the GI's position." In an Army war game, two-thirds of the soldiers who fired this weapon were "killed" by enemy counterfire. Rather than suspecting enemy chicanery, or weapons acquired second hand from the army of Fredonia, the Army was planning a new high-energy warhead for the bazooka, which was designed in Norway and manufactured by the Hesse Eastern Co. of Brockton, Massachusetts. If the new warhead works, it is expected to increase the effectiveness of the weapon to "more than three shots in ten."

It apparently will not help the exposure problem, but that exists with the Army's heavier, more effective anti-tank weapons too. The "Dragon" and the "Tow" are both wire-guided, requiring the person who fires it to stand in view of the tank while the missile streaks towards its target. The Scripps Howard story reported that "Internal Pentagon estimates, based on recent war games, show that up to a third of the GIs using Dragons will be killed by enemy counterfire after firing their missiles, while as many as 85 percent of those firing TOW missiles will die in enemy counterfire." Could Oliver North have known what he was doing in selling TOWs to Iran?

Jerome Richard is a Seattle writer.

The Rock Island line

With these problems in mind, I wrote to Senator Dan Evans, a moderate Republican who was critical of some of Reagan's defense policies and who has now left the Senate. My letter proposed a Manually Launched, Visually Guided, Igneous Anti-tank Weapon, dubbed MLVG21AW17 for short. I wrote that my proposed ordnance "admittedly won't do much more damage to an enemy tank than the present M72A3s, but they do have several advantages. It is less likely to expose the G.I.'s position, is much lighter, has at least a 50-50 chance of hitting the target when properly launched, and I can let the Army have them for only $5,347 each. . . ." In case no one got the point, I added: "In fact, I have a big pile of them sitting out in the backyard."

No one got the point. Instead of the appreciative response from the senator I hoped for, sharing my

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amusement at a weapon that appeared to be more dangerous to its gunners than to enemy tanks, and expressing a determination to monitor the defense budget more closely as a result, or a routine reply thanking me for my views and promising to keep them in mind, I received a letter that said:

"Thank you for your recent letter regarding a replacement for a new anti-tank weapon.

"I have contacted the appropriate government officials regarding this matter and as soon as I receive a reply I will be in further contact with you."

Surely, I thought, the appropriate government official would reply to Senator Evans's aide with some reference to satire or perhaps rebuke a smart-aleck who was wasting his valuable time, but instead, a few weeks later, came another letter over the senator's signature that said: "In response to my inquiry, I have received the enclosed reply from the Department of the Army."

The reply said that, "The information supplied by Mr. Richard has been forwarded to the U.S. Army Armament, Munitions, and Chemical Command, Rock Island, Illinois." Rock Island? Were they catching on? I was asked to send additional technical information as well as the names of people associated with the proposal, and "the proposed price, description of the organization, previous experience in the field, and facilities to be utilized."

In the best bureaucratic jargon I could manage, I wrote a two-page "valid unsolicited proposal" that finessed the question of other people associated with the project, reiterated the apparent need for such a weapon and its advantages vs. the M72A3, and said: "The price will depend upon the size and number ordered, but I estimate it should be $35 each F.O.B. Seattle in minimum lots of 100 for the manually launched version." As far-fetched as it still seemed, the idea that the Army was really going to buy rocks from me was beginning to take on an unanticipated life of its own. I could not keep from thinking of ways to enhance the proposal. "Decoration and packaging," I went on, "are extra. If this charge is not high enough, the price can of course be raised, and cost overruns are to be expected."

I would have to go back to my Boy Scout days to find any relevant experience, unless skimming rocks on a lake would count, but I pointed out that the weapon itself has a long tradition and that its production required only unskilled labor.

I sent this reply off in late February and as the weeks went by, my apprehension grew. Was some guy from the Army going to come to my door and punch me in the mouth, or worse, put me at the wrong end of an M72A3? (And which is the wrong end of an M72A3?) I couldn't believe they were really taking this seriously! I could see some team of weapons experts trying to unravel the mysteries of this new weapon, perhaps planning to sell the idea to TRW or McDonnell Douglas. Still more weeks passed, and I convinced myself that someone at Rock Island must have finally gotten the joke and trashed my not-so-valid but certainly unsolicited proposal. Then a letter arrived! It was ominous.

Middle Eastern middlemen

After acknowledging receipt of my letter, and enclosing it, the Chief of the Programs, Policy, and Control Division at Rock Island wrote: "I have enclosed the envelope in which it was mailed. Notice the red stamp 'The Enclosed Has Been Found Loose in the mails at Terminal Annex, 98134.'" The chief also wrote that his office had no record of receiving my original proposal. If the Russians start throwing rocks at our tanks, clearly loose security at the Post Office is to blame. The chief then recommended that I resubmit my proposal to the Army Armament, Research, Development, and Engineering Center at Picatinney Arsenal in New Jersey, where security, presumably, is tighter. Noticing that no one blinked at my mention of cost overruns, and hence tantalized by the thought of obscene profits, I complied.

This time the response came from the Unsolicited Proposals Coordinator at Picatinney Arsenal: "You may wish to submit an unsolicited proposal to this office. To assist you in preparing your proposal, enclosed is the pamphlet AMC-P 70-8." But he also advised me that this "should not be construed as an invitation to expend effort in the preparation of an unsolicited proposal and does not represent a commitment by or for this center or the U.S. Army."

The 69-page pamphlet was full of useful advice, as well as the addresses of the various army laboratories where new weapons systems are tested. It also set out a list of criteria, all of which had to be met for a proposal to be considered. One was that the proposal had to be "innovative, unique, and have military application." The problem was that while my proposed weapon had military application, it was hardly unique. I was between an anti-tank weapon and a hard place.

For days, with visions of government-paid country club memberships and secret deals with Middle Eastern middlemen dancing in my head, I contemplated some new and unique variation on the rock. I could think of none.

Maybe they would buy it if I stamped on each rock: "Pay no attention to that soldier behind the tree." □

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Have Mac, Will Publish

Today's alternative papers are surprisingly good. Here's why.

by John Eisendrath

For years children died painfully and unnecessarily in the working-class neighborhood of Phoenix called Maryvale. They died of leukemia. They died often: At least 28 succumbed between 1961 and 1985, twice the national rate. Even though state health officials knew about cancer-causing groundwater contamination in Maryvale, they refused to investigate. And local elementary school officials covered up, fearing disclosure's impact on enrollment. The daily papers missed the story. Ditto local TV news.

It was the Phoenix *New Times* that nailed it. That alternative weekly broke the story in June 1987. Within weeks the scandal attracted politicians, health officials, and dailies like the Phoenix *Gazette* and the Arizona *Republic*. Within months the bandwagon stopped. And today only two constants remain: Maryvale's groundwater is still contaminated, and the *New Times* is still on the case, still chiding polluters, government officials, and the public.

The *New Times*'s well-documented, heart-rending, and consistent coverage represents journalism—alternative or otherwise—at its best. Alternative papers often do. This may come as a surprise to those outside the journalism fraternity, but on the inside it is well-known. In fact, one of the mainstream media's dirty little secrets is the frequency with which reporters on daily papers crib ideas, quotes, and more from their alternative counterparts.

When you look at some of the great stuff that shows up in the alternative press, that's hardly surprising. Like last December when the *L.A. Weekly* described how, in 1976, as director of the CIA, George Bush defied orders from President Ford to release documents vital to a Justice Department investigation of CIA involvement in covert domestic operations. Two months passed before the same incident got the attention of *The New York Times*.

These stories don't just happen; they come about because alternative newspapers are in a position to do things that the big boys no longer have interest in or feel comfortable with. Most of the alternatives are financial upstarts and hence tend to be freer from the corporate and Chamber of Commerce mentality that so often gets in the way of the real stories. Especially the local ones that Knight-Ridder or Cox overlook because they are not usable in multiple markets. Being more financially marginal also means that these papers attract writers who come to a story for reasons other than money—reasons like they *care* about their subject, or are *pissed-off* about a misdeed. It also means the alternatives are more open to writers without the "right" Journalism 101 credentials. Although this produces reams of purple prose and painfully twisted syntax, it also undoubtedly spawns freshness in content and style. And alternatives can report on mainstream newspapers with great effect.

John Eisendrath, a former editor of The Washington Monthly, *is a Los Angeles writer.*

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None of this is to say that the alternatives don't turn out their share of lousy journalism. They have for instance, a tendency to be longwinded. A recent East Bay (Berkeley) *Express* cover story jumps to pages 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19—at which point the writer pauses to offer a loving exegesis on animal excrement. A promising story on women working their way through college as strippers in the *Chico* (California) *News and Review* is likewise digressive—for some reason, half the story's space is given over to a writer's personal breast flashbacks.

And the alternatives are no stranger to irresponsibility. In February the San Luis Obispo *New Times* ran a story headlined "Parole Denied" in which California prison officials were ripped for not supporting the release of a convicted kidnapper. Yet it turns out that the author never spoke with the allegedly reformed prisoner, and her scathing critique was based exclusively on comments by the kidnapper's attorney. And don't forget sophomoric: Rhode Island's weekly *New Times* refers to the daily Providence *Journal* as the "Providence Urinal."

So admittedly, alternatives are erratic. But they offer a glimpse of what more big-time newspaper journalism should and could be: interpretive, reflective, and iconoclastic. They remind us of the limits of the five W's school of journalism and the value of point of view. As many dailies either fold or become homogenized members of a national chain or enter into quasi-monopolistic joint operating agreements, the alternatives stand apart, siren-like, daring dailies to be different.

Growing in a generation from a lone voice in Texas to more than 100 papers with a weekly readership in excess of three million, alternatives are an emergent and in some ways revolutionary force in American newspaper journalism. Even if at this stage much of the force is still just potential, it's a very promising potential.

From the start the alternative press has been liberal. It began in 1954 when a group of Texas Democrats approached Ronnie Dugger about starting a weekly paper. "In the mid 1950s people in Texas were in despair about the daily press," recalls Dugger. "[It] was racist, anti-civil liberties, a black hole culturally." His alternative, the Texas *Observer*, was and is unabashedly populist and purely political. No sports. No crossword puzzles. No cartoons. It's always been a classic muckraking journal.

A year later and a world apart, Norman Mailer, Dan Wolf, and Ed Fancher founded the Village *Voice*. Conceived of as a writer's paper, the *Voice* introduced the New Journalism of Mailer and Tom Wolfe. The 1960s were, according to Geoffrey Stokes, a *Voice* columnist and author of the *Voice Anthology*, "arguably the paper's heyday, as its new writers, unleashed by Wolf, chronicled—passionately—the civil-rights movement, hippies, Yippies, dope, rock, the peace movement, Chicago. . . ."

The *Observer* is restrained. The *Voice* is emotional. The former singularly political. The latter an innovator in arts and entertainment reporting. One sets an agenda. The other a lifestyle. They represent the alternative extremes. Newer alternatives almost always aim somewhere in between.

> For the most part, A.J. Liebling was right: The power of the press belongs to those who own one–the rich and powerful. But the alternatives usually belong to people who are neither.

Interviews and punch outs

Strains of the *Voice* are evident in papers like the Boston *Phoenix*, created in 1966 as a vehicle to publish arts and entertainment listings with "news as an afterthought," says Katherine Fulton, editor of *The Independent* in Durham, North Carolina. Others, taking their cues from the *Observer*, were all news. The Phoenix *New Times*, for instance, began in 1970 "as a reaction to Kent State and the coverage of it locally," says Michael Lacey, its founder and editor. Lacey recalls how at that time construction workers were converging on local campuses to impose their own vision of America on students. "Our first story was on a construction worker who interrupted the interview to punch out a student—he knocked his front teeth out—before coming back to finish the interview."

Today the alternative press is thirtysomething and it shows. Publishers range from sixties radicals to eighties Yuppies. From people like *L.A. Weekly* publisher Jay Levin, who believes "the mass media is so inaccurate and distorted that true journalism is the mission," to Syracuse *New Times* publisher Art Zimmer, who explained in a recent issue that "I bought the paper to keep you. . . informed on the latest ski information."

The result? Vast differences of opinion about

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editorial direction. At the Chicago *Reader*, an extremely successful 18-year-old paper patterned after the *Voice*, planning sessions are eschewed and freelancers relied upon. At *The Independent*, weekly editorial meetings with staff reporters are the norm. While Boston *Phoenix* editor Richard Gaines prides himself on always being "in the competition to break hard news," *Express* editor John Raeside believes "a lot of alternative papers suffer from crusaditis."

But there is at least one point alternative publishers and editors seem to agree on. "Our newspapers have nothing in common with the underground press" of the 1960s, protests Richard Meeker, publisher of *Willamette Week* and president of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (AAN). The common misperception is that alternative papers simply evolved from that counterculture genre, which advocated unlawful behavior, and was fraught with radical babblings and unwholesome helpings of the ideological flavor of the week. "The underground press was published by people who had given up on America," Meeker says. "We believe we can change America and have as big a stake in the system as anyone."

This doesn't mean that the alternatives are completely free of the characteristic flaws of the old underground papers. Some alternative journalism looks like it was never read twice, much less edited. In Milwaukee's *Shepherd Express*, we learn that a female police officer's harassment "complaints may have never went beyond [the chief's] desk. Officials from the Police Internal Affairs allegedly told [her] there was not enough sufficient evidence. . ."

And there's often incredible close-mindedness. A recent Los Angeles *Weekly* story compared southern women to a bird that "determinedly bashes its tiny brain into car windshields," life in Los Angeles to life in East Germany, and dismissed as too conser-

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The Atlantic
BusinessWeek (4)
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Chicago Times
Columbia Flier
Common Cause
Consumer Reports
Forbes (2)
Fortune
Harper's (2)
Houston City Magazine
Illinois Issues
The Independent (North Carolina)
Miami/South Florida Magazine
Mother Jones
National Journal (2)
New Age Journal
New England Monthly (2)
Newsweek (2)
N.Y. State Journal of Medicine
New York Times Magazine (2)
The New Republic (2)
The New Yorker
Reason
Regardie's
Science '82
Science '83
Sports Illustrated
Texas Monthly (3)
Texas Observer
Time (2)
The Valley Advocate (Hatfield, MA)
The Washington Post Magazine (2)

Newspapers/News Services

The Ann Arbor News
APF Reporter
The Arizona Republic
The Baltimore Sun (2)
The Boston Globe (2)
Chicago Tribune (3)
The Cleveland Plain Dealer
The Clinton Enquirer
Dallas Times Herald
The Denver Post
Detroit Free Press (3)
Gannett News Service
The Honolulu Advertiser
The Kansas City Star
Knight-Ridder (2)
Los Angeles Times (4)
Lexington Herald-Leader
Los Angeles Herald Examiner
Louisville Courier-Journal
The Miami Herald
The Minneapolis Tribune
The Morning Advocate (Baton Rouge)
The North Jersey Herald & News
New Jersey Reporter (2)
The New York Times (12)
The Orlando Sentinel (2)
Philadelphia Inquirer (2)
San Jose Mercury News (2)
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
The Sentinel Star (2) (Orlando)
Staten Island Advance
The Times-Picayune (New Orleans)
The Tulsa Tribune
United Press International
USA Today
The Wall Street Journal (5)
The Washington Post (13)
The Washington Times
Wilkes Barre Times Leader

Radio/TV

ABC-News
CBS-News
Frontline (2)
Maine Public Broadcasting
National Public Radio
NBC-News (3)
PBS
WDVM-TV, Washington D.C.
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vative anyone unwilling to be assaulted—literally punched in the face—by someone living below the poverty line.

Crybaby billionaire publishers

Some alternative writing is way too conspiratorial. "If Khomeini succeeds," opined San Francisco's *Bay Guardian* in an editorial on the Salman Rushdie affair, "why won't politicians and big corporations update and renew their political and economic death threats to their enemies?"

Paranoia of this magnitude is not new to *Bay Guardian* editor Bruce Brugmann. For 23 years, he has obsessively pursued three issues: the Manhattanization of San Francisco, the cozy relationship between Pacific Gas & Electric and local powerbrokers, and joint operating agreements between newspapers. In Brugmann's overstating hands, publishing executives become "crybaby billionaire publishers" and the lack of a public electric company becomes "the worst scandal in San Francisco history." Although Brugmann's concerns are valid, his world is just a little too full of "secret talks" and "sleight-of-hand deals."

Quite a bit of alternative fare is just plain weird. "Sitting at a table littered with books like *The Coelum Pholophorum*. . . I ask [the bagpiper] what the connection is between alchemy, writing, and piping," Bryce Milligan wrote in the San Antonio *Current*. 'I'm not sure there is a difference,' he replies."

The most common failing of the alternative press, however, is its tendency to attitudinize. Yes, some alternative journalists let their reporting speak for itself. But too many report softly and shoulder a big chip. Consider a January cover story in *Washington City Paper* on D.C.'s congressional delegate, Walter Fauntroy. In it Mary Ann Blouin writes that the third-ranking Democrat on the House Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee has acted in a way that should make "voters wonder if he isn't in the banking industry's pocket." But Blouin's own reporting shows that the facts hardly confirm this. She chastised Fauntroy for taking $15,000 from bankers' political action committees, yet acknowledged this is less than one-tenth the amount given by bankers' PACs during the same period to former

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In a city besieged by drugs, rotten schools, and crumbling roads and bridges, the New York City Council passes virtually no significant legislation and undertakes no important investigations. "But the council has been an effective promoter of its own purse," *Newsday* writes. The council boosted its budget 40 percent in the past three years, doubling its staff, and buying VCRs, cameras, televisions, car phones, chauffeurs, chablis, and brie. The council's lone Republican receives an extra $20,000 as "Minority Leader," even though she has no one to lead.

The Patriot Ledger

The Asian population of Quincy, Massachusetts has risen from 740 to 10,000 in the past nine years, bringing a backlash of racial prejudice and occasional violence. In a 12-part series, the paper dispels a town myth that the newcomers have gotten an unfair economic advantage through special government help. The paper shows the difficulties Asians have had in getting health care and police protection, and documents their high savings and low welfare rates.

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The award for stories published or aired in April will be announced in the July/August issue. Nominations for stories published in May and June will close July 15. The winner will be announced in the September issue.

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Willamette Week has seen its graduates move on to *The Wall Street Journal, BusinessWeek, Rolling Stone*, and yes, *The Washington Monthly*.

committee chairman Ferdinand St. Germain. She listed all the PACs that have "kicked in" money to Fauntroy, only to point out elsewhere that the $62,000 he took in this way recently was less than one-third the House average. As for the influence all this money has had on Fauntroy, Blouin could find none. Indeed, she pointed out Fauntroy's support of an antibanking piece of legislation and quoted a lobbyist for the Consumer Federation of America who said Fauntroy "can be counted as one of the small bloc [of votes] that we have."

This kind of story illustrates the alternative tendency to preach to the converted. Sometimes alternatives forget that challenging, even engaging, readers is a central concern. With some alternatives you're lucky to get an outquote—those enlarged snippets of copy run alongside the story—you can understand. "In the emerging Gaian politics," begins one blurb in the *L.A. Weekly*, "the isolated citizen once represented by a politician will be exchanged for the participatory individual living as a symbiotic organelle. . ." (This is typical of the *L.A. Weekly*'s pseudo-intellectual bent. Pseudonyms in a recent *Weekly* story on being poor in Hollywood weren't the likes of "Ralph" and "Joe"—they were names of characters from the German film *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.)

The 'Y' word

That alternatives often think too narrowly of their readership makes the financial success enjoyed by some all the more amazing. The 10-year-old *L.A. Weekly*, for instance, grossed $7 million last year. Between 1984 and 1988, annual revenues for *Baltimore City Paper* quadrupled from $1 million to $4 million. Last year the Village *Voice* earned $5 million on almost $20 million in gross revenue. In 1987, Rupert Murdoch sold the *Voice*, founded with an initial stake of $10,000, to Hartz Mountain pet-product magnate Leonard Stern for $55 million—$40 million more than he had paid for it nine years earlier.

Of course, revenues at most alternatives do not approach this level. Primarily political papers like the *Observer* are with few exceptions consistent money-losers. The money-makers are the ones like the Boston *Phoenix*, which tap pop culture's pocketbook. Founded as an entertainment guide, the *Phoenix*, originally *Boston After Dark*, provided Boston's many college students with listings of what was going on—movies, theater, restaurants. It was an immediate success. Annual revenues grew from $17,000 in 1966 to $540,000 in just four years—the equivalent of nearly $2 million today.

From its inception the *Phoenix* was a crassly commercial venture, the brainchild of two college kids and a student at the Harvard Business School who identified a market, calculated its need, and supplied the appropriate product. It was, says William Henry, a former Boston *Globe* reporter now an associate editor at *Time* magazine, "one of the earliest and shrewdest examples of hip, if not hippie, capitalism."

Many other alternative publishers were equally hip, in terms of both production and distribution. Starting almost without exception on a shoe string and sweat equity, alternative publishers could not afford to build circulation patiently through subscriptions. They needed advertising revenue immediately, and, to get more than a negligible amount, they needed to show market penetration. They got this overnight by taking a page from the extremely profitable suburban newspaper chains that had for years handed out editorially weak but ad-rich weeklies known as "shoppers." The alternatives followed suit by giving papers away for free and making it up on volume. "We needed to offer volume circulation right off the bat," says Jim Larkin, the former publisher of the Phoenix *New Times*. "By giving the paper away we immediately took a section of the market."

That section consists primarily of the 18- to 30-year-olds whom daily papers have trouble attracting and whom advertisers love. Alternative publishers market their papers specifically to this audience. The *Reader*, for instance, circulates exclusively along Chicago's north lakefront, a haven for the young and upwardly mobile. The *New Times* in Phoenix is similarly focused. "We seek out locations where white collar people go—certain supermarkets, restaurants, places those people frequent," says Scott Spear, the paper's publisher.

According to *The Alternative Press 1989 National Ratebook and Directory*, weeklies have

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secured an affluent readership in city after city. Readers of the Rochester, New York *City*, for instance, live in households with a median income of $40,000. Ditto for the *Worcester Magazine* in Worcester, Massachusetts. Readers of the *Maine Times* ($42,000) and the Hermosa Beach, California *Easy Reader* ($54,000) are even more prosperous.

The image of the alternative press as favored reading in the BMW set is one many editors and publishers know cuts against type. "You had us all believing that you were quietly...waiting on tables in vegetarian restaurants and that you [drove] a VW bus," begins an ad in Atlanta's *Creative Loafing* designed to catch the eye not of the reader (who presumably knows what type of car he drives) as much as the potential advertiser. "But now we know you were really climbing your way up the corporate ladder, having power lunches, and making business calls from your BMW. We won't stoop to using the 'Y' word. The truth is quite shocking enough."

Re-Bertha blues

Perhaps most shocking of all is that conservative business principles—low start-up costs and overhead, high volume, and non-union labor—rather than liberal editorial policies are primarily responsible for the expansion of the alternative press. Being poorer and out of the official loop has meant that alternatives have been financially creative as well. It was the alternative papers, not the big dailies, that pioneered such cash cows as personal "in search of" ads and ad rates supported by guaranteed free distribution. Such practices have made publishing more accessible to entrepreneurs. In 1986, for instance, Steven Moss cashed in the $4,000 he had saved up in his IRA, bought an Apple Macintosh computer, and printed out a mock version of his dream paper, the San Luis Obispo *New Times*. He used it to solicit ads from local businesses and within months was giving away 30,000 papers a week. For the most part, A.J. Liebling was right: The power of the press belongs to those rich enough to afford one. In the world of daily newspapers, TV, and even radio that means being both rich and powerful. But today, as when Dugger began the *Observer* 35 years ago on borrowed money, the alternative press more often than not belongs to people who are neither. In an era of multi-billion dollar media mergers like that just concluded between Time Inc. and Warner Communications, and of newspaper giants like Gannett Inc.—which employs 37,000 people—you can't overstate the importance of being able to extend the media's bully pulpit to people like Steven Moss.

The same low overheads and quick start-ups that can democratize the press this way can also detract from editorial content. While some alternatives go to excruciating lengths to differentiate themselves from daily papers, lots of others simply copy dailies and other mainstream publications. For example, a story on housing activist Bertha Gilkey, which ran last January in St. Louis's *Riverfront Times*, was essentially the same story that appeared more than a year earlier on Gilkey in *The New York Times* and on "60 Minutes." The Massachusetts Valley *Advocate* regularly reprints the *Harper's* Index. Even *USA Today*'s "Voices" section—head shots of average Joes answering questions of the day—is a fixture in many alternatives.

> There is little alternative journalists love more than sticking it to the mainstream press. And little they do better.

As for the common complaint that as part of the Gannetting of America, daily papers have become too homogenized, many alternatives have as well. Syndicated columns ranging from "News of the Weird" to Hunter S. Thompson appear in many of AAN's 54 member papers. Almost all run the same cartoons. AAN even has its own Washington-based wire service.

It's also true that lots of alternatives have lousy editors. Some would-be disciples of the *Voice* refuse to sharpen their blue pencils on the vague and oh-so-convenient principle that theirs are writers' papers. Others confess to less lofty reasons. Moss, publisher of the San Luis Obispo *New Times*, says gaps in reporting made him uncomfortable running the "Parole Denied" story. "But we had to go with it or be in trouble," he says. "We didn't have any other copy."

Anti-Zionist secrets

But somehow the alternatives keep cranking out hits. In February 1988, in the mainstream San Francisco *Examiner*, Philip Matier wrote a front-page story blasting a city supervisor for allegedly constructing an illegal rental apartment behind his

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house. Six months later the alternative *San Francisco Bay Guardian* revealed that *Matier* had also built an illegal unit. The *Bay Guardian* published a picture of the unit, tweaked Matier for his double standard and questionable ethics, quoted the contractor saying Matier had stiffed him for the final $1,800 payment, and even got the managing editor of the *Examiner* to explain how Matier was eventually taken to task by his own paper for his indiscretion.

There is little that alternative journalists love more than sticking it to the mainstream press. And there is little they do better. Especially at the Village *Voice*. For years some new double standard was regularly unearthed by Geoffrey Stokes, whose Press Clips column combined investigative journalism with enticing gossip. Last February, for example, Stokes nailed the *New York Daily News* for petitioning a court to identify the member of Tawana Brawley's grand jury who leaked information to *The New York Times*. Stokes noted that shield laws are designed to protect source confidentiality and that the *News* had in recent years testified before the state legislature on behalf of such laws. He even got *News* editor Gil Spencer to admit his paper's action was "indefensible."

Ironically, Stokes's authorship of the column came about only after his predecessor, Alexander Cockburn, was done in by an expose in the Boston *Phoenix*. That story, written by Alan Lupo, revealed how Cockburn, who relished disclosing conflicts of interests among other journalists, had secretly accepted a grant from an Arab organization that subsidized his writing because it liked his anti-Zionist point of view. In the aftermath of Lupo's story, Cockburn left the *Voice*.

And in addition to tweaking the mainstream press, alternatives frequently *scoop* them. When rumors swirled last fall around the private life of then-mayor Henry Cisneros of San Antonio, Texas, it was the weekly *Current* that broke the adulterous facts. Long before pollution in the Boston harbor became a national story, the *Phoenix* had beaten Beantown dailies to the story. William Henry confesses that "many a Boston *Globe* reporter, including this one, can remember receiving from former editor Tom Winship some crumpled *Phoenix* article attached to a scrawled note that read, 'Why we no have?'"

Although most alternative scoops involve local stories, there are times—as with Bush, Ford, and the CIA—when they beat dailies to stories of national interest. Like the matter of Dan Quayle's law school grades. Throughout the campaign last fall, the national media was on the prowl for proof of the Republican Veep candidate's scholarly indifference, but could never produce hard numbers. Finally, by somehow tapping into Indiana University Law School's computer records, the *Indianapolis New Times* discovered that Quayle graduated with a C+ average—something that had eluded NBC, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.

Or consider *Washington* (D.C.) *City Paper*'s Bork video caper. In the fall of 1987, during Robert Bork's Senate confirmation hearings on his nomination to the Supreme Court, *City Paper* freelancer Michael Dolan obtained Bork's rental records from a local video store. With this document before him—dominated by Alfred Hitchcock, Cary Grant, and James Bond—Dolan spun out a tongue-in-cheek psychological profile of Bork for the benefit of the investigating senators. What a package—novel story idea, current events angle, and a research technique no one had ever thought of before. Although Bork himself may have been outraged, there wasn't much he could say about it—after all, he'd already gone on record saying that he didn't think there was a constitutional guarantee of the right of privacy. That's not to say the story didn't cause an uproar. As if to emphasize the impact a so-called small-time paper can have, Congress responded almost immediately with a law that protects itself from similar investigations—the Video Privacy Protection Act.

The sleepy judge

As downtown institutions in cities across America, daily papers are typically part of the local elite. Editors and publishers are often tied in with the Chamber of Commerce crowd, and for them the line between being a journalist and being a civic booster is, as a result, often blurred. Alternatives are not a part of this culture and one of their most valuable contributions is their proclivity for commenting on it. The *San Francisco Bay Guardian* has for years decried the fact that the owners of the *Examiner* and *Chronicle*, which support annual utility rate hikes, also own lots of stock in Pacific Gas & Electric. And just last April, Fred Stickel, publisher of the daily *Oregonian* in Portland, refused to run a column in his paper about a circuit court judge falling asleep during a murder trial. Stickel, it seems, is a friend of the judge. A week later the column ran in *Willamette Week*, complete with a preamble describing Stickel's fraternal censorship.

Considering the local stature most dailies enjoy, it is ironic that at most of them, metro reporting is considered grunt work. Ben Bradlee once noted that he didn't know a metro reporter who wouldn't give his eye teeth for a spot on the national desk. For the upwardly mobile scribe at even a mid-sized daily, Washington is the place to be. And not the Washington where people *live* but Congress and the White House.

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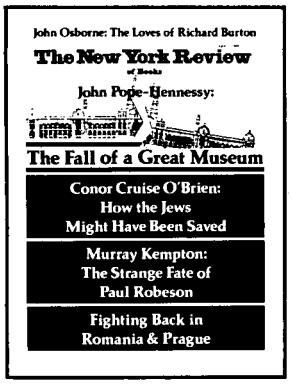

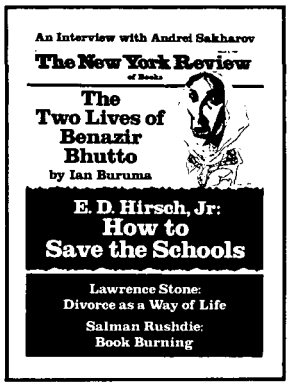

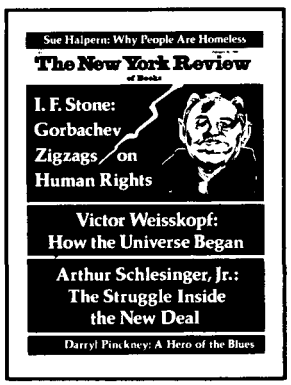

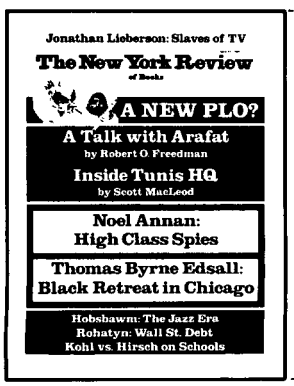

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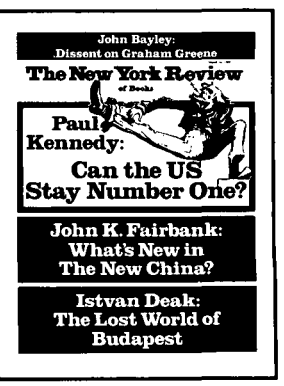

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Alternatives, by contrast, are committed to local news. In part out of necessity: "I have no confidence in our ability to do national or international stories," says *Willamette Week* editor Mark Zusman. "What we're good at is writing about the institutions that drive this city." *Washington City Paper*'s editor Jack Shafer calls it the same way: "We're swimming in copy about the Federal City, but there's a real Washington in which people live. And we try to write about that. *The Washington Post* only rarely writes about this city as a city somebody lives in. On their Metro page, they rarely tell you what all the facts they've accumulated *mean*."

The suburban-metro-national-international pecking order of most dailies is on-the-job credentialism. Want to do investigative reporting? First you have to spend a couple of years covering suburban PTA meetings. Eyeing international? All roads pass through city hall. Daily reporters cover beats as a way of getting their tickets punched. At the alternative papers there are no such bureaucratic hurdles; for them, the only credential a reporter needs is curiosity.

Ironically, the best case against credentialism in journalism is made by the dailies themselves because they continually snap up reporters from the weeklies. Molly Ivins went from the Texas *Observer* to *The New York Times* and is now a columnist for the Dallas *Times Herald*. Former Boston *Phoenix* film critics Janet Maslin, David Denby, and Stephen Schiff have gone on, respectively, to *The New York Times*, *New York* magazine, and *Vanity Fair*. Other former *Phoenix* reporters are currently employed at the *San Jose Mercury News*, the San Francisco *Examiner*, and the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. The Phoenix *New Times* has sent reporters directly to the Dallas *Times Herald* and *The Wall Street Journal*. *Willamette Week* has seen its graduates move on to *The Wall Street Journal*, *BusinessWeek*, *Rolling Stone*, and yes, *The Washington Monthly*. "At papers like ours, an inexperienced writer can generate the kind of clips that you can't at the dailies," says *Willamette Week*'s Mark Zusman. "Ones that show you can *think*."

Maids and burglars

Alternative editors give reporters more room than their daily counterparts and more confidence, too. There is a sense that no story is too big or too difficult. That none is off limits. Such trust is amply rewarded in pieces like Todd Oppenheimer's in *The Independent* on inequities in the Durham, North Carolina tax system, for which he won the Investigative Reporters and Editors Award. Or in Eric Dexheimer's deft explanation in *Willamette Week* of how the New York leverage buy-out firm of Kohlberg Kravis and Roberts has, through a series of mergers, become the largest employer in the state of Oregon.

The writing styles and viewpoints produced in the alternative editorial atmosphere are also often memorable. In the East Bay (Berkeley) *Express*, Laura Hagar tells us what it's like to be a maid: "Being a house-cleaner is kind of like being a burglar, except the hours are better, the money is worse, and there's less heavy lifting. Both know the joys of walking alone through a stranger's empty house. Both have felt that blissful cocaine distance, that illusory invulnerability that comes from moving untouched among the possessions of others. It is almost like being a ghost, except ghosts, I am told, are bound to a place out of love or fear. Housecleaners and burglars are bound by money and quirky professional pride."

You could search a long time in your daily paper for the satirical look at political "one-liners" that comes from applying the what-if-you-never-existed principle of *It's a Wonderful Life* to contemporary politics. But that's what Jamie Malanowski of the Miami *New Times* gives you. In wondering what would have happened if Clint Eastwood had not survived the plane crash that nearly killed him before he went into acting, Malanowski spins out the following scenario: "In 1971, Frank Sinatra is persuaded to accept a part he'd previously rejected, and going against type, plays the violent Harry Callaghan in *Dirty Harry*. Audiences cannot distinguish this portrayal from his performances in *The First Deadly Sin*, *The Detective*, *Contract on Cherry Street*, or *Tony Rome*, and the film flops. There are no sequels, meaning that there is no *Sudden Impact*, meaning that "Go ahead, make my day" is never uttered. This means that President Reagan is forced to grope for a line with which to threaten Congress, causing confusion when he finally says, "Flashdance. . .what a feeling!"

In an essay reviewing the first five years of *The Independent*, editor Katherine Fulton noted that Eudora Welty had said her purpose in writing was "to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight," and went on to admit that "a [newspaper] rarely achieves that level of insight." But Fulton concluded that "it can keep trying. It can be a vital champion—determined, along with you, to keep learning, growing, dreaming."

At their best, alternatives reach out and make the reader feel a part of something—a community of ideas, a group of people who care deeply about where they live and how to make it a better place. Their continued growth and success could goad "big-time" newspapers into being more like that too. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

MAYOR BARRY SAYS HE'S TRYING, BUT IT'S BEEN MUCH HARDER SINCE HIS SOURCES DRIED UP

The New York Times recently ran a story about the Washington, D.C. municipal crisis under the headline, "Capital Mayor Told He Must Do More On Drugs."

NEW YORK TIMES TOLD IT MUST DO LESS ON DRUGS

The *Times* also recently ran a story under the headline, "Child Abuse: Critics Say New York Can Do More."

AT RESTFUL ACRES, OUR MOTTO IS DEATH BE NOT PROUD

A Fort Lauderdale family has sued a funeral home, claiming that a damaged casket allowed mourners to see the deceased's foot, and that a cemetery employee interrupted the graveside service to demand that the rabbi move his car.

LUX ET AVARITIA

Yale Law School is taking a contingency fee to represent a New York City woman in a multimillion dollar estate dispute.

BUBBLES AND ME ALSO DISCUSSED THE THIRD WORLD DEBT CRISIS

The Capitol weekly newspaper, *Roll Call*, reports that Rep. Jim McCrery was recently seen dancing at a topless nightclub in Myrtle Beach, S.C. with one of the performers while wearing her bra on his head. McCrery said that while at the Dollhouse, he "wasn't representing Congress," and later added that the *Roll Call* story failed to accurately portray the true tenor of the evening.

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ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU...

The Washington Post reports that an attorney representing Ronald Reagan has asked the Social Security office in Westwood, California about starting payment of the former president's Social Security benefits of $800 or so a month.

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How to Revolutionize Washington with 140 People

The small agency that put a poetry scholar in the cab of an 18-wheeler and sets an example for the rest of the federal government

by Scott Shuger

Although probably nobody at the Pentagon would admit it, their much-prized Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) may have already been shot down. Not by a particle beam. Not by an antisatellite pellet-warhead or a space mine. But by OTA—hardly a space-based techno-marvel—just Congress's Office of Technology Assessment, very much ground-based in a red-brick neocolonial at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 6th Street S.E.

As part of its mandate to keep Congress apprised of emerging and future technologies, OTA undertook a study of SDI, focusing especially on the system's technical feasibility and survivability. Contrary to much of the rhetoric we'd been getting from administration partisans and military men ever since Ronald Reagan's 1983 speech first broached the idea of the system, OTA's principal findings were: 1) Even under the most generous assumptions about our deployment and Soviet counter-moves, the contemplated wonder system "might destroy anywhere from a *few* up to a *modest fraction*" of attacking Soviet ICBM warheads (emphasis added); 2) The system might be able "to protect successfully a useful *fraction* of certain sets of U.S. *military* targets" (emphasis added); 3) Certain types of nuclear antisatellite weapons available to the Soviets in the 1990s "pose a significant threat" to SDI and "might prevent full system deployment and operation altogether"; 4) "There would be a significant probability (i.e., one large enough to take seriously) that the first (and presumably only) time [SDI was]...used in a real war, it would *suffer a catastrophic failure* [emphasis added]....The relatively slow rate of improvement in software engineering technology makes it appear unlikely to OTA that this situation will be substantially alleviated in the foreseeable future."

If you live beyond the Beltway, chances are you haven't heard much about OTA on Star Wars or on anything else. And although OTA's criticism of SDI was literally page one news in D.C.—"Hill Agency Challenges Reagan Vision" was the *Post* headline—most Washingtonians likewise haven't the foggiest notion. Hardly anybody anywhere knows that it is one of the few government bodies succeeding at something worthwhile.

The range of topics OTA takes on is astounding. The office's publications include:

- "Wood Use: U.S. Competitiveness and Technology"
- "The Border War on Drugs"
- "Displaced Homemakers:Programs and Policy"
- "Technology and Handicapped People"
- "World Petroleum Availability: 1980-2000"

Scott Shuger is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Professor W.D. Kay of Northeastern University provided research assistance for this article.*

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► "Issues in Medical Waste Management"
► "Automation of America's Offices"
► "Energy Technology Transfer to China"
► "Do Insects Transmit AIDS?" (Very unlikely, says OTA.)

The study OTA did on the validity of polygraph testing concluded that despite widespread industrial use of the devices, they were highly unreliable for employee screening. This report was cited frequently in the House and Senate hearings leading to last year's federal ban of most polygraph testing in the private sector.

A few years back, in its studies of the decision-making processes in high energy-consuming industries, OTA discovered that although such firms will accept very long payback periods for product development and other investments, virtually all of them were limiting their energy-conserving investments to those achieving payback within three years. In short, the agency proved that the then-available 10 percent industrial energy tax credit had virtually no influence on corporate conservation practices. Upon receiving this information, Congress dropped that tax credit.

With only 140 employees, OTA is one of the smallest agencies in Washington—John Gibbons, OTA's director, jokes that "the Botanical Gardens are smaller than we are, but that's about it." Yet despite producing reports with a press run of only a few thousand copies, OTA's findings often reach a surprisingly wide audience. Within a recent six-month period, for example, an OTA report on infertility found its way into such diverse publications as *Harper's*, *Hippocrates*, *Self*, *Ms.*, *Parenting*, and *Glamour*.

OTA's work is important because most of the great national concerns dominating the front page since about 1970 have had significant technological dimensions. You want to know how to deal with acid rain, nuclear war, a sagging steel or auto industry, Medicare costs, global warming, workplace safety, AIDS, or air safety? Then you've got a lot of homework to do. Getting help with its homework was what Congress had in mind when it created OTA in 1972.

Yet what's most important about OTA is not what it studies but how it studies it. In evaluating various technologies and their application or regulation by the government, OTA tries to see what works and what doesn't. In this respect, it differs from most other investigators and journalists in Washington, who are preoccupied instead with illegality and impropriety, mostly of the monetary sort. For when OTA looks at a government activity, it is usually to determine not whether money is spent legally but whether it is spent *wisely*. At its best, OTA is one of the few organizations actually looking into whether government does its job *well*.

Tennis shoes and binoculars

Pick up an OTA study or two and you'll notice something else unusual—they make it clear why the reader should care about the problem at hand. Here's the opening paragraph of "Transportation of Hazardous Materials": "Hazardous materials are transported safely every hour of every day. Yet few activities with such statistically low risks arouse such intense public concern. Houston citizens did not remain calm when a speeding truck carrying an intermodal tank of highly flammable methyl methacrylate hit an exit ramp guardrail. The driver was killed. The tank broke open, its contents ignited, and the resulting inferno destroyed part of the freeway and dropped burning debris on the street below. Fortunately, no one else was hurt, and the Houston Fire Department already had a hazardous materials response team with the knowledge and the equipment to handle the accident. Denver residents were similarly stunned when a truckload of Navy torpedoes overturned one Sunday morning on a city freeway exit loop. No one was injured, but hours passed before experienced federal assistance arrived. Worried state and local officials did not know whether the scattered weapons needed to be defused before cleanup could begin." The important thing about this kind of writing is not that it's effective—although that it is—but rather that it's a sign the authors haven't been lulled to sleep by their topic. Despite many meetings suffered through and files dusted off, it's obvious the investigators haven't been tricked into thinking that their topic is some dull little time-filler. They know that they are working on it

OTA's work is important because most of the great national concerns have significant technological dimensions.

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because THERE ARE TRUCKS FULL OF TORPEDOES OUT THERE.

This alertness to the reality quotient goes hand in hand with a sensitivity to significant and helpful details. Once again turn to the hazardous materials report: "Arguments over statistics are immaterial to the public safety person first at the scene of the accident. He is likely to be one of the nation's one million largely untrained volunteer firefighters and may be confronted with a placarded, derailed railroad tank car spewing a mysterious cloud that burns his eyes. Chances are his basic training has included suiting up, moving in, and spraying water or foam on such a car. He probably has not heard that the simplest equipment for dealing with a hazardous materials accident includes tennis shoes and binoculars—tennis shoes to run away and binoculars to read the hazardous materials placard from a distance."

Unlike most investigators in Washington, when OTA looks at a government activity, it is usually to determine not whether money is spent legally but whether it is spent *wisely*.

Or consider the OTA report on infertility. The woman's perspective is put across like this: "You are sitting in the waiting room of your doctor's office. You have been trying to have a baby for three years and things are not happening the way you had planned. You have been on clomiphene for a year. Lately you cry at the drop of a hat—when you see a diaper commercial on television, see a pregnant woman at the grocery store, or get an invitation to a baby shower. The whole world seems to be having babies.

"You always thought of yourself as competent, able to handle anything. Now you feel depressed every month when your period begins. You are beginning to think that having a baby is the only thing that will make your life worthwhile. You feel odd, different. *Everyone* can have a baby. *What's wrong with me?*"

The man's perspective is sketched in equally personal terms: "It is 2 p.m. You are sitting with your wife in the doctor's office, waiting to be told what to do next to get your wife pregnant. You gave a semen sample two days ago to some lab person. You are sure that humiliating experience was just the beginning of many more. You are wondering how bad your sperm are. . . .

"What if the doctor suggests a specialist, another semen sample, surgery on your testes? Don't they know how much you hate masturbating in the bathroom while they wait outside? You wonder if your wife will want to be with you if you can't give her a child. How will you explain to your family that you can't continue their name? What if your wife wants to use donor sperm? Can she possibly understand how defective and inadequate this makes you feel?"

Patents and poets

The OTA report on the use of contractors in the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund suggests that the EPA is being hurt by its increasing dependence on environmental consultants with substantial commitments to the waste management industry. You could trade statistics back and forth about that forever. And while the OTA's report does wade into that numerical swamp, it also makes the more telling decision to look at the emerging culture of the waste management world. The report notes that "the brochure announcing the 'Hazardous Waste Business 89' conference in March 1989. . .opens with 'Win your share of the billion in profits ahead.' The brochure goes on to give examples of success stories: companies whose revenues and profits have increased dramatically in recent years. Of the 24 sessions at the conference presented by the industry's leaders, not one deals with managing and assuring environmental performance or quality of company products or services."

These excerpts highlight the aspect of the OTA perspective that is particularly striking for an operation dedicated to technology issues—its readiness to appreciate and emphasize the *human* factors and solutions embedded in a technical problem. The OTA report, "Patenting Life," which addresses the maze of scientific, legal, and regulatory issues raised by the new recombinant genetics, nonetheless prominently features an admirably clear discussion of the relevant ethical considerations. The main emphasis in OTA's studies of air traffic safety has been tightening up accountability inside the FAA, strengthening hiring, certification, inspection, and

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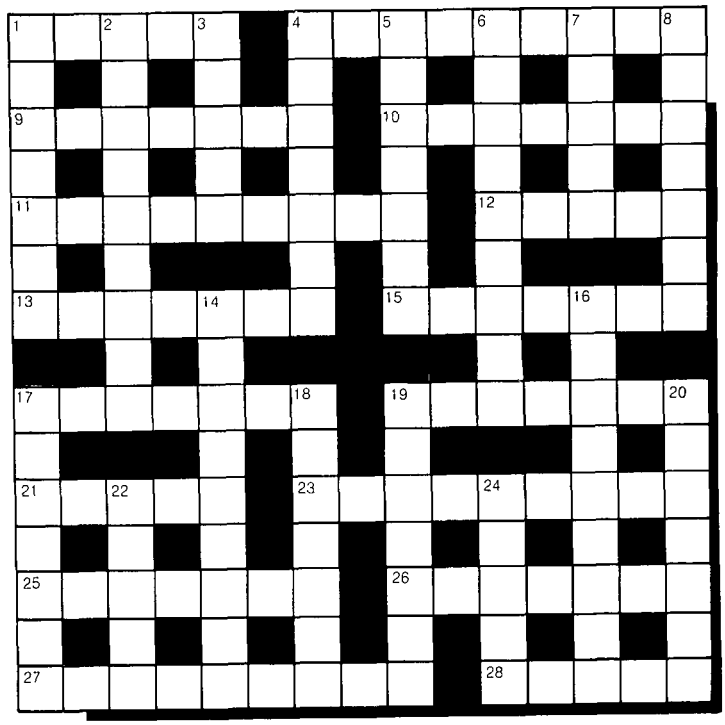
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



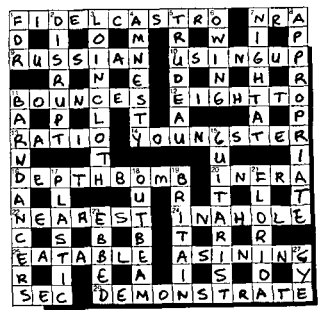
ACROSS

1. Be in 51 before 50? It's a lie. (5)
4. Clumsily rig skeins for thinker out of power. (9)
9. Risky following Virginia without H for opening. (7)
10. Discordant noise at part of Soviet Union. (7)
11. Swiss family shakes up rosin snob. (9)
12. Map detail for popular people? (5)
13. Instruction not here casually. (2,5)
15. Reconstructed airplane missing starter is less fancy. (7)
17. Edible fruit made it a crop. (7)
19. Ten err about excellence to make comeback. (7)
21. Something still warm at the end of the end of the year. (5)
23. Military installations around Vapor St., N.Y. (4,5)
25. Incongruities from one preceding confused senior. (7)
26. Strange pleasure without a rejection. (7)
27. Mean rains disturbed earthquake victims. (9)
28. Land described in elegy P.T. Barnum delivered. (5)

DOWN

1. Fifty-four or no Italian port. (7)
2. Slanderer organized bib racket. (4,5)
3. Noted communist baseball team comes up after end of April. (5)
4. New York tee OK for major address. (7)
5. Puss pet dancing for increases. (5,2)
6. Difficult but nice trait developed. (9)
7. Receives North inside for some men. (5)
8. Led tracer around circle for power plant. (7)
14. Formula type cooked no curries. (9)
16. Without effort, raise sun effect before turn assembly. (9)
17. Here at home organized crime infiltrates health organization. (7)
18. Mediterranean site dressed in a suit. (7)
19. Goes back to make minister rest uneasily. (7)
20. Way to cook crepes before tea. (7)
22. Implement good times around river's edge. (5)
24. Bugs developing in cup up Aesop's alley. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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reporting standards—not automatically buying high-priced new technologies. Similarly, OTA has urged much more government and industry involvement in long-term research into human error in the cockpit and control tower. The office's work on highway truck safety also focused on the people behind the machinery. It recommended improved emergency response training, improved screening of driver accident records, and tighter regulations governing permissible driver hours and blood-alcohol levels, while calling for aggressive federal research into sleep and fatigue. The general public was surprised that the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill was probably caused by a drunk captain. Readers of OTA reports were not.

"With highly technical organizations like the FAA, the tendency is to look for a technical fix," says Edith Page, OTA project director for these airline and trucking studies, "and the human factors emphasis is such a revelation to them."

OTA's skepticism about technology-for-technology's-sake is a product of the kind of people who work there. They are not narrow specialists. "In the early days they sometimes called us the Office of Technology *Harassment*," recalls John Gibbons. Page, for instance, is a former English professor who wrote her master's thesis on the poet George Herbert. Gibbons himself is as prone to quoting Sophocles and Edna St. Vincent Millay as to discussing his own work on the evolution of the heavy elements.

The current staff also includes: a guy with degrees in religious studies and forestry, a computer whiz with advanced degrees in forestry and soil science who's also a lawyer and one of the world's leading oceanographers, and a registered nurse with a Ph.D. in philosophy. "You want to make sure you understand the problem or the opportunity in its larger dimensions," Gibbons emphasizes, "and you can't do that with just engineers and economists."

Mutant petunias

So we see the formula for success beginning to emerge: readable, compelling reports written by broad-gauged authors who understand the human dimensions of technological problems. Another crucial factor in this success is that OTA's work, unlike so much academic analysis, does not rely solely on written sources. At OTA, the authors get out of the office. They interview people in the field. They *see* what is happening.

For her airline safety work, Edith Page has done shifts in air traffic control centers and has flown in planes testing anticollision devices by flying near-crash courses. For the truck safety study, she sent one of her analysts out on a four-day cross-country trip with a driver. That's one of the ways OTA found out the extent to which government rest requirements have fallen victim to company deadlines. And Page herself drove an 18-wheeler. "You should have seen the driver looking at this lady in her high heels. Marv, his name was. He was very nervous. The stopping wasn't so much of a problem, but the gear shift was. You have 16 gears and you've got to *ooooch* it over."

This is not to say that OTA has a flawless record. Some of its reports have been wrong. Like the May 1988 report on "Field-Testing Engineered Organisms." This was OTA's attempt to look at what happens when the rubber of genetics meets the road of the environment. Are we setting ourselves up for an Andromeda Strain—runaway mutant killer organisms of our own design? While hardly saying this, the report endorsed, without exception, a requirement of a case-by-case review for each proposed engineered organism before it is introduced or tested in the field. This position struck many people in science and government as excessive and naive. One very senior official at a Health and Human Services agency with extensive biotechnology responsibilities—despite thinking that on the average, OTA reports are good—says this report was "really awful." He asserts: "If someone wants to cross a petunia with a tulip in their garden to see if they like the result, they don't have to come to EPA and FDA! We just don't do that. That would be disruptive to industry and academics. It would overwhelm government."

Other outside reviewers had similar criticisms. One biochemistry professor claimed the report conflicted with "a substantial record of expert opinion," including the National Academy of Sciences report on the same subject. And an embryology professor called the document "a ruinously corrupting lie," marked by "regulatory doublespeak." But when OTA's Gibbons got wind of these complaints he had several congressmen on the OTA board write to the HHS official's boss asking him, in Gibbons's words, to "call off his dog."

So Gibbons seems to have compounded a bad report by a close-minded reaction to criticism of it. For someone who is constantly urging other agencies to be open to evaluation, such defensiveness is especially unfortunate.

OTA's main danger, however, is not being too resistant to criticism but caving in to it. For every OTA report, there is a 10 to 15 member outside advisory panel populated exclusively by non-OTA experts and interest group representatives. The advisory group for one recent report included representatives from Boeing, General Motors, United Airlines, the Air Line Pilots Association, the Teamsters, the New York Port Authority, the Rhode

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Island Public Utilities Commission, Public Citizen, and Harvard.

When this panel system works well, it can produce results like this positive one described by Edith Page: "The American Petroleum Institute had a representative from Exxon on the advisory panel for our report on the transportation of hazardous materials," Page remembers. "And he did not like it at all that we said that more injuries and damage occur from shipments of gasoline than from shipments of all other hazardous materials put together. He wanted us to take that out entirely, and I said, 'I'm sorry, but we can't do that because it happens to be true.' He said, 'Well, we know it's true.' And I asked, 'How can we say that without threatening you?' I pointed out that we also know gasoline makes up about half the shipments. 'Well,' he said, 'why don't you say that too—in the same sentence.'"

The formula for success: readable, compelling reports written by authors who understand the human dimensions of technological problems.

In other words, the outside panel system works when the OTA staff is willing *both* to listen to the outsiders and—when the facts dictate it—take stands against them. In this case Page did both, hearing a legitimate point made by the industry rep but not allowing him to alter the truth.

Vital bodily fluids

Less steadfastness was displayed by Gibbons when the Pentagon objected to R. Jeffrey Smith's *Washington Post* story on the SDI report. After the story came out Smith's editor received a letter cosigned by Gibbons and the then-director of the Pentagon's SDI office saying that Smith's story didn't accurately represent OTA's report in all respects. "This was outrageous," states Smith, who based his story directly on material supplied by OTA, "and showed OTA at its most callow."

Another occasional result of the outside pressure is blandness. One OTA report contains this unhelpful pronouncement: "Arguments can be made both for and against the idea of including information about financial gain in the required disclosure of information to patients and research subjects." And there's the tendency to give polite consideration to arguments that don't really merit it. As one critic of OTA observes: "In a report on the quality of the water supply, you don't have to give consideration to the view that fluoridation is a communist plot to sap our vital bodily fluids."

But OTA is *not* routinely mealymouthed. "OTA finds that aviation safety will be best served by introducing [the Traffic Alert and Collision Avoidance System] on commercial aircraft as soon as possible," states one report. "OTA finds that federal accident records suffer from significant underreporting and do not provide an accurate assessment of the level of safety. . ." states another.

It's with unequivocal findings like these that OTA is making an important contribution to the congressional understanding of technological issues. Another recent OTA success is cited by the ranking minority member of the House Science, Space and Technology committee, Rep. Robert Walker, who refers to the study his committee commissioned on multi-purpose, low-tech payload rockets—so-called "big dumb boosters." "That's something that NASA and the military have not been particularly anxious to look at. Because the operating concept in rocketry in the country has always been to build the highest tech rockets available. . . . Big dumb boosters are a totally different concept. To get NASA or the Air Force to look at that concept is to have them reject all that they believe about technology, and you need somebody like OTA to step in to say that this may be viable."

As an example of OTA work instrumental in the development of legislation, Kathleen Merrigan, a Senate Agriculture Committee staff member, refers to the office's recent study covering U.S. investment in biotechnology, which showed a great lack of government financial commitment to agricultural biotech. "That's something Senator Leahy knew about and had talked about with a lot of people, but once that report came out, he had credible numbers to use. He will use that report when he talks to the Department of Agriculture going into the 1990 farm bill."

Senator Leahy wasn't the only one who appreciated OTA's work on the topic. "That report was of such interest to the Japanese," reveals Merrigan, "that they had it fully translated within one week after it came out." □

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AMERICA'S GUERRILLA WARRIORS

LANSDALE'S LAMENT

The U.S. prepared for the wrong World War III

by Georgie Anne Geyer

Immediately after George Bush took over the presidency, it was duly announced that foreign policy experts at the State Department, the National Security Council, and elsewhere in the "respectable" corridors of power were busily studying four main areas as part of the new administration's "foreign policy" review: U.S.-Soviet relations, arms control negotiations, defense policy for the 1990s, and future requirements for conventional and nuclear forces. One could almost hear Edward Geary Lansdale turning over in his grave. He would be groaning helplessly at the same time that he would be shaking his head back and forth, all the while whispering to himself, "Will they never...never...never ever *learn*?" Then he would return once more to the eternally uneasy sleep of "those Americans who tried to do things differently."

Who was Lansdale? To Graham Greene, he was Alden Pyle, "The Quiet American," a classic American innocent, not in Paris but in the poisoned, unfinished trouble spots of the world, nothing more than a CIA agent with "an unmistakably young and unused face." To Jean Larteguy, he was Colonel Lionel Teryman, "Le Male Jaune," a tough, brutal new American midwest version of Lawrence of Arabia. To the American writers William Lederer and Eugene Barnum Hillandale, "The Ugly American," practically the only American who understood how to mold with original hands the real and fractious world of new decolonized countries. To his brother, Benjamin Carroll Lansdale, he was always a "revolutionary." Quixotically and finally, Oliver North, totally unlike Lansdale in any sense of realism or proportion, looked upon himself as "Lansdalian."

But perhaps former CIA Director William Colby characterized Lansdale best, if uncritically: "Lansdale helped and perhaps created the best president the Philippines ever had...turned American policy away from support of French colonial rule in Vietnam to support of a non-Communist nationalist leader...he preached for Americans to support those willing to fight for themselves...." He was "one of the greatest spies in history...the stuff of legends."

Edward Geary Lansdale was born in 1908 in Dayton, Ohio, emerging out of all the parts of America he was to fight to make understand. The American century was at the heady height of its beginning. The American mission was clarion clear, and the prototypical American military men of the time were rough-riding, hard-drinking men of utter assurance about America, men like Teddy Roosevelt. By the time Lansdale died in 1987, everything had changed. America's dynamic assurance had been savaged by wars that Americans just couldn't understand—different wars in unfinished countries like Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon, Iran, Nicaragua, El Salvador.

Lansdale's saga is that he, almost alone in this period of tragedies for American president after American president, did understand. The lanky American kid from Dayton with the big nose and the advertising executive's mind saw that the weapons and techniques that America was using

Georgie Anne Geyer is a syndicated columnist.

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simply did not match the demands of these new and bedeviling worlds. Lansdale himself, when he was in Vietnam in the formative 1950s, said that he had the terrible feeling that he was seeing the beginnings of World War III in these Third World conflicts. Actually, he was right. While traditional American military thinkers were out scanning the horizons for nuclear subs and missiles, the real war of our times was the one that Lansdale understood.

The happy Huk-er

First, the book.* There are other biographies of the biographogenic Lansdale, not to speak of his own rather emotional and unsatisfying autobiography, *In the Midst of Wars*. But this one will go down as the best book on him so far. It is a serious and readable book, not written with any compelling brilliance but filled with new and original materials gleaned from what is obviously a determined search for the man, his ideas, and his effectiveness by the author, Cecil B. Currey, a professor of military history at the University of South Florida and a chaplain and full colonel in the Army Reserve.

The book does lack some context that I personally would have liked. Why *do* Americans temperamentally not understand these new Third World conflicts? What *did* Lansdale accomplish in the end? How did his tactics and techniques jibe with the American character, or not jibe with it? Why was that magical and ultimately chimerical American "third force"—the search for reasonably stable democratic governments in the turbulent decolonized countries that would fall between Marxism and the Old Right—so devilishly difficult to empower and to keep in power?

Lansdale came from a rather traditional American family of farmers, construction workers, labor

* *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American.* Cecil B. Currey. *Houghton Mifflin, $24.95.*

WHO'S WHO

Why does the White House seem to have no communications strategy, with a president whose day, as *The Washington Post* put it, often offers "a jumble of public events, tumbling over and into each other with no apparent theme and little success in dominating the news"? After **George Bush** and **John Sununu**, the man insiders say is most to blame is **David F. Demarest Jr.**, the White House communications director. He was chosen for the position by **Robert Teeter** when Teeter thought he was going to be the **Michael Deaver** of the Bush administration, with broad control over White House image-making. Cynics suggest that Teeter recommended Demarest because he thought Demarest's talents were dim enough that he would represent absolutely no threat to Teeter's power.

The leading beneficiary of Bush's hostility toward **David Hoffman** of *The Washington Post* (see "Who's Who," April) is **Ann Devroy**, of the same paper, who is the recipient of leaks from the White House staff that are designed to make her look good in her competition with Hoffman for the esteem of her editors. . . .

One rumor going around the State Department is that **Janet Mullins**, the assistant secretary for legislative affairs, is replacing **Margaret Tutwiler** as **James Baker**'s closest confidant. Tutwiler's anxiety about the situation is said to explain her decision to use a cubbyhole office adjoining Baker's instead of the much grander chambers available to an assistant secretary for public affairs, a decision that has the incidental effect of leaving her hundred or so subordinates in the public affairs office feeling leaderless most of the time. . . .

Baker has worries of his own. From the time he leaked a story last fall describing himself as "deputy president" in the new administration, George Bush has consulted him less and less about matters outside the realm of foreign affairs. . . .

As many people expected, **Robert Guttman**'s tenure as **Dan Quayle**'s chief of staff was short-lived. He will be replaced this month by **William Kristol**, the son of the neoconservative guru **Irving Kristol**. The younger Kristol is even more conservative than his father, is reported to have been the author of Quayle's speeches attacking the "godlessness" of the Soviet Union, and is also said to believe that **Richard M. Nixon**'s policy towards the Soviet Union was "too soft." . . .

In—*White House:* Science Adviser—**D. Allan Bromley.** *Agriculture:* Chief of Staff—**Patricia M. Kearney.** *Treasury:* Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy—**Sidney L. Jones.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Chairman, Federal Trade Commission—**Janet Steiger.**

Out—*Health and Human Services:* Director of the National Institutes of Health—**James B. Wyngaarden.** *Treasury:* Deputy Secretary—**M. Peter McPherson.** *Agencies and Commissions:* Member, National Labor Relations Board—**Wilford W. Johansen.** Member, Federal Home Loan Bank Board—**Roger F. Martin.** Member, Federal Home Loan Bank Board—**Lawrence J. White.**

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leaders, and small businessmen. It was a happy family, with three close brothers. Lansdale was a jack-of-all-trades for a while: he worked in advertising, wrote plays, and drew cartoons (artistic talents, it should be noted, are rather surprisingly present in many military men). But it was when he joined the army reserve that he found himself, as he began to study the U.S. military and find that it was "fighting yesterday's war all over again."

It was in the Philippines, where he was sent with the army in 1945, that Lansdale was thrown into what was to become his life's work. Filipino democracy should have been a shining new hope for Asia, but it wasn't, because a group in Central Luzon calling itself the "People's Anti-Japanese Army," or the "Huks," were ready to communize the former colony. The Huks, Lansdale was to find, "fought with amateur intensity, despised wealthy fellow countrymen who collaborated with their enemies, and assassinated many collaborationists." They soon became Lansdale's military responsibility, and, in conformance with his nature, Lansdale immediately decided that this problem was not even primarily military. It was in 1945, Currey tells us, that Lansdale "made a decision that would influence his thinking for the remaining years of his career. Knowing that his men would give him accurate reports of official plans and knowledge, Lansdale decided he needed an additional dimension of knowledge. He would study the conflict from the inside."

From the inside! That voyage is the mark of the good reporter and the good writer. It has not been the insignia of the "good" military man, who most often believed in imposing force from above and from the outside, in the tradition of Czar Nicholas in World War I sending his Russian soldiers out to fight with swords and axes against the new German artillery. Having decided to work "from the inside," Lansdale did an amazing—and a new—thing. He went out into the mountains of central Luzon. He camped out on their trail and waited for the Huks. He insisted that "it was not so dangerous. I was the one person sitting there and they were an armed group. I would smile and give them something or some food or did anybody want a drink? They would come up and say, 'Yeah, I'd like a cigarette,' instead of shooting me. You didn't kill a guy laughing, being nice to you."

Fake vampires

Little by little, working from inside ("there was no military school on psychological operations," Lansdale noted at this time), he learned that the situation was actually remarkably little like what was blithely assumed in American and Filipino military headquarters. It was the infamous "Makabulos Massacre" of August 20, 1950 that finally convinced him of the need for observing these new insurrections not militarily but psychologically. That day, a small group of Huks appeared to go berserk in the town of Makabulos. They attacked a small hospital and killed everyone, even the innocent patients, by hacking them to death. It was not foolish for this to seem a sure and severe setback for the Huks.

But when Lansdale went there—observing from inside again—he found the situation totally different from what he expected. He found that the townspeople regretted the attack but that the "most vivid memory of the people was how polite and thoughtful the guerrillas had been. . . ." Some of the guerrillas had gone to the movies, where they waited. At dark, they took over the streets, asking the people politely to remain indoors. "It was the polite and courteous warnings of the Huks, many of them relatives, that people remembered. Lansdale was glad he had not trusted official or press stories."

How could this have happened? Lansdale decided that it was a classic example of the military principle of economy of force, and of effective strategy and tactics. Meanwhile, "while the Huks were running a revolution," Currey concludes, "the Philippine government was fighting them as though they were formal enemy armed forces. . .and the military saw themselves as separate from their people."

Lansdale was sent back to the Philippines in 1950 with an incredible mission. In just three months, Currey writes, Lansdale was to protect American interests in the Philippines, consolidate a power base for Ramon Magsaysay, make progress in the war against the Huks, revitalize the Philippine army, and urge political reform. He employed every psychological trick in the book. Using the old "system manipulation" and "motivation analysis" that he had learned in advertising, he used everything from the fear of vampires (he had his trained Philippine soldiers fake fatal attacks by the feared vampires against Huks in the countryside) to the organization of voter groups. At one point, his tactics tricked the Huks into withdrawing from a crucial election, thus in effect giving the vote to the government. He took the night away from the Huks in the countryside, and finally he took the revolution away from them, but only because by that time he had found a superb politician, Ramon Magsaysay, to become the president in 1951.

What were Lansdale's personal abilities? Above all, he was very personable. His bad ear and tongue for languages didn't seem to make much difference because he had a special look in his eyes, a look of empathy, and "an ability to try to communicate

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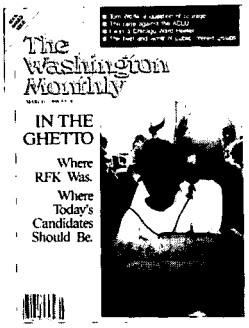

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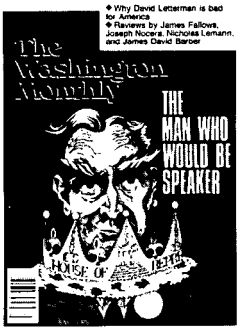

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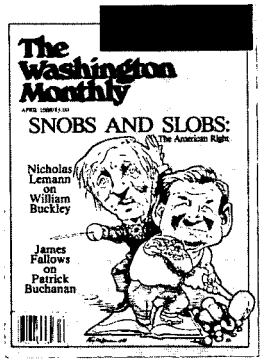

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without words." Asians remembered, even after many years, that Lansdale never ordered people, he always "suggested, in the most disarmingly nice way." They said, with uncannily almost the same words that Cubans use about Fidel Castro or cult followers about cult leaders, that Lansdale would sit quietly and listen to you talk and then he would "sum up in his own words and with his own emphasis what had been said. Says one awed follower of his, "Suddenly you are getting a revelation. You think, 'Oh, my God. Why didn't I think of this?' "

The X factor

Lansdale did not wear white gloves; he knew people were going to die in what he did, and he was satisfied to see the enemy die. He understood that Oriental insurgencies had their own rules of warfare and combat. "The rules are as different as the difference between Wars I and II," he said, typically. "Because so many of us haven't understood the rules, we have lost thousands upon thousands of square miles of real estate, millions of people have been brought under subjection by the enemy, and we have expended great material wealth in the struggle. The little guys, the rice paddy farmers, know far more than the policymakers. Theirs is the simplified wisdom of the victim."

Lansdale's early euphoric victory in the Philippines soon faded into increased frustration. Ultimately, in his later years, it turned to desperation. The beloved Magsaysay died in the horror of a small plane crash in 1957, thus thwarting his Filipino democracy before it could really take root. Meanwhile, Lansdale's voyage through the early American intelligence agencies is interesting reading here, but it is also frustrating reading, as the bureaucrats held tightly to power—and to outdated and unworkable ideas. We see an increasingly hopeless Lansdale sent to Vietnam in the late fifties, where he railed against our policies of support for the French and where he tried to create a new Magsaysay in the priestly and guileful mandarin Ngo Dinh Diem. John F. Kennedy often called upon Lansdale for personal advice, for Kennedy had at least some unformed ideas about "irregular warfare" or "low-intensity warfare" and all those fashionable phrases that Lansdale's wars came to be called. But when Lansdale warned desperately and correctly against the doomed Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy to his sorrow paid no heed. The rest of the "best and the brightest" were far worse. Once during the Vietnam years, Lansdale tried to tell Defense Secretary Robert McNamara that Vietnam could not be won as it was because of the "X" factor. What was that? McNamara asked with the customary disdain he showed in those days for anyone who suggested anything beyond his vaunted military hardware playthings. "The 'X factor' represents the feelings of the Vietnamese people," Lansdale told him. "That is the vital element in a 'people's war.' " McNamara only grimaced at this suggestion and asked him sarcastically how he could get a reading on people's feelings?

Lansdale was no angel. He took an important part in the CIA's "Operation Mongoose" to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro. He strangely went against his own most treasured rules in Vietnam, when he was trying desperately to build support for Diem, by bribing generals of the many sects in Vietnam to bring their men behind Diem. In his own book, he then lied about this, an unpalatable act that was later revealed in the Pentagon Papers. And yet he knew things and he represented ideas and possibilities that were so far beyond the rigid and stratified—and, as it turned out, tragically unsuccessful—military thinking of his time that he remains a lone and original operational giant of modern warfare and America's role in it.

As Lansdale moved toward his death in 1987, he tried to call America to the real world of irregular conflict by recalling Continental troops at Valley Forge, officers and men under American guerrilla leaders like Marion or Greene. He talked of the motivation of modern insurgent troops, of the use of propaganda. When Richard Nixon, who respected Lansdale, asked him in 1984 for some of his brief thoughts about modern wars, Lansdale wrote that "conventional operations are more apt to widen the problem or to be more cosmetic than a cure." The people were the true battleground of war and "whoever wins them, wins the war."

Lansdale was not a systematic thinker, however, as his own book reveals. He brought no original body of thinking to life, he applied only old and hoary guerrilla concepts that one can easily find in history. That, of course, makes it all the more amazing, and aggravating, and ultimately tragic that American military "thinkers" have been so opaque about these modern wars that are indeed the World War III that they kept looking for in other places.

CIA chief William Colby, who was more open to the Lansdalian ideas, wondered once, "How do you deal with a maverick-artist in a large institutional bureaucracy? There aren't any easy answers. We need the large institutions. We need the discipline they have. We also need the geniuses. How do you patch them together?"

The tragedy for America is that we have not even now learned "how to patch them together." In the end, the sorrowful truth is that our military failed over and over and over in these new-style wars, and there is no assurance that they are past. □

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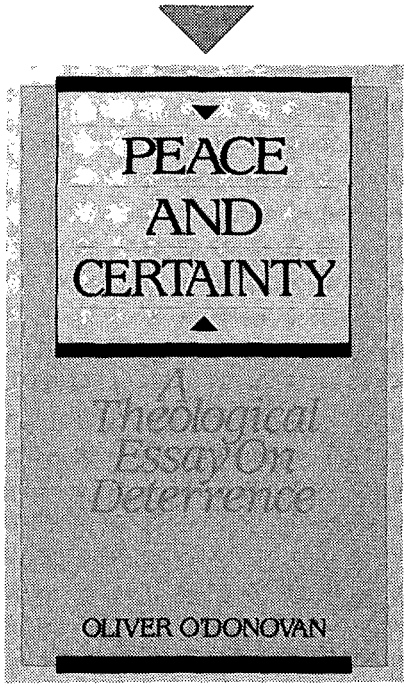

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THE LIMITS OF MACHO

David Hackworth knew how to win battles. But not the war

by Michael Massing

In recent months, an extraordinary report criticizing the American role in El Salvador has been circulating within the U.S. military. Written by four lieutenant colonels in the U.S. Army, the report asserts that the war in El Salvador is "stuck" and that the United States is "itself stuck with the war." Despite "important progress toward democratization," the lieutenant colonels state, "the Salvadoran government remains ineffective," incapable of meeting "basic human needs." U.S. economic assistance, they assert, "has achieved little," and the Salvadoran military remains "remarkably immune" to U.S. efforts at reform.

The report, titled *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador* and published by the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, a Washington think tank, has stirred outrage among many policymakers. The State Department's Office of Policy, Planning, and Coordination has drafted a sharp rebuttal. Officials at the U.S. embassy in San Salvador angrily dismiss the report as excessively pessimistic. And top officers in the Salvadoran army accuse the lieutenant colonels of displaying a colonialist mentality by meddling in the Salvadoran army's internal affairs.

But *Small Wars* has gained many backers as well. In fact, it has served as a rallying point for those within the U.S. military and State Department who question the official optimism about the war in El Salvador. They believe that the war is stalemated and likely to remain so until that country's government and army do a better job of winning the support of its people. They also believe that the U.S. military hasn't the foggiest idea of how to help them achieve that. As these dissidents point out, since 1981, the U.S. has sent more than $3 billion in economic and military assistance to El Salvador, helping to enrich government bureaucrats and military officials but making little difference in the life of the average Salvadoran.

With their report, the lieutenant colonels (A.J. Bacevich, James D. Hallums, Richard H. White, and Thomas F. Young) join a long line of internal critics who, over the years, have chastised the U.S. military for its inability to fight guerrilla wars. These critics, exponents of counterinsurgency doctrine, complain that the U.S. military is too large, too reliant on sophisticated technology, and too conventionally oriented to wage the type of economic, political, and social warfare required to defeat Marxist revolutionaries. Rather than simply sending helicopters and howitzers, they say, the U.S. should be spearheading a broad reform program aimed at cleaning up the government, developing the countryside, and involving the military in civic action projects like building roads and providing health care. Since the early 1950s, when Edward Lansdale traveled to the Philippines to take on the Huk rebels, these guerrilla buffs have fought their own war with the bureaucracy in Washington, agitating for a more flexible, creative approach to Third World conflicts. Now another shot in the battle has been fired. *About Face*,* by Colonel David H. Hackworth, is an important addition to the counterinsurgency bookshelf. It shows how innovative the practitioners of counterinsurgency can be—and why they are ultimately doomed to failure.

Benders and brothels

About Face was 18 years in the making. That's how long it took Hackworth to get over his decision, in 1971, to go on national television and denounce the U.S. effort in Vietnam. At the time, Hackworth was one of the most decorated officers in the U.S. Army. His appearance on ABC's "Issues and Answers," however, quickly turned him into a pariah. The response from the military was so vehement, in fact, that Hackworth feared he might be assassinated. Army brass launched an investigation into his performance as a commander, but before it got very far, Hackworth, knowing they'd find many prosecutable offenses, managed to sneak out of Vietnam and return to the United States. He spent a month driving across the country, eluding Army agents assigned to tail him. They eventually caught up with him in a motel outside Washington. By then, Hackworth had hired high-powered attorney Joseph Califano, and the Army, reluctant to call more attention to the affair, agreed to discharge the colonel without further sanction.

Michael Massing is a 1989 Alicia Patterson fellow, writing about U.S. counterinsurgency warfare.

* *About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior.* David H. Hackworth and Julie Sherman, *Simon and Schuster, $24.95.*

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Embittered, Hackworth migrated to Australia—"the farthest place from the United States I could find and still speak English." Broke and burned out, he became a hippie, opening a diner, buying some gas stations, managing a restaurant for a woman who eventually became his wife. Throughout this period, Hackworth stayed far from politics. That abruptly changed, however, with the election of Ronald Reagan. As the U.S. arms buildup got underway, Hackworth hit the lecture circuit, warning Australians about the perils of nuclear war. At the same time, he grew increasingly concerned that the truth about Vietnam was being distorted for political purposes. So Hackworth decided to write—or, it seems, dictate—his life story.

About Face is at once fascinating and exasperating, a sprawling 833-page tome that, like its subject, is bitter, frank, funny, vulgar, self-serving, and undisciplined. Hackworth seems driven by a desire both to emboss his own legend and to reform the American military. Hackworth belonged to an elite breed he calls "warriors"—fearless, bellicose men who feel most alive when risking death. He won eight Purple Hearts in Vietnam; on one occasion, he snuck out of a hospital so that he could return to the fighting. A firm believer in "selective insubordination," he regularly got into fights, talked back to his superiors, went on all-night benders, played high-stakes poker, even set up a brothel in one of his units. Hackworth ran his men so hard that at one point they placed a $3,500 bounty on his head. "Mr. Infantry," he was called.

Reading *About Face*, it's hard not to think of John Paul Vann, the compelling subject of Neil Sheehan's *A Bright, Shining Lie*. Both shared a contempt for the military establishment, pissing off legions of fussy bureaucrats with their maverick, can-do ways. Peerless professionals on the battlefield, away from it they flew into rages, chased women, and bragged shamelessly about their exploits. Hackworth and Vann also underwent similar political journeys, changing from gung-ho patriots to outspoken critics. There were some important differences, though. While Vann retained his faith in America's ability to win the war in Vietnam, Hackworth became a skeptic, questioning whether the nation had the commitment to match its massive firepower. Moreover, while Vann died in a plane crash, Hackworth lived to tell his tale. In many ways, *About Face* reads like the book John Paul Vann might have written had he survived the war.

Pot smokers and love beads

David Hackworth is not a big thinker. During his career, he had numerous opportunities to attend West Point, the Army War College, and other educational

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institutions, but, ever the warrior, he contemptuously turned them down. His book reflects this. It contains few insights into matters of grand strategy, the roots of revolution, or the types of political reforms that absorbed Lansdale. Rather, it's a highly personal look at war. Hackworth takes us from post-war Trieste, when he faced off against the Yugoslavs, through his grueling years in Korea, where he first displayed his extraordinary courage, to his time as a battalion commander in the Mekong Delta. This last assignment was by far the most taxing. "I am convinced that no American soldier has ever suffered more than the infantrymen who fought in the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam war, and that includes those at Valley Forge, the Bulge of Christmas '44, and Korea in the winter of '50," Hackworth writes. He describes the hordes of rats that came to chew on dead flesh; the vipers that crawled into sleeping bags and bit men as they slept; the vicious red ants that stung so sharply that they could make a man stand upright in the midst of battle.

Such tales of war make up the core of *About Face.* Unfortunately, after a while, they all tend to run together; there are only so many slit throats and lost limbs that a reader can endure. The book is further marred by its relentlessly boastful tone. Hackworth is forever being offered plum assignments that were out of all relation to his rank, and every time he gets one, he informs us how remarkable it was that a mere lieutenant or captain or whatever he was at the time would be chosen for such an important post. Similarly, most chapters begin with testimonials from soldiers whom Hackworth and his writing assistant (and current girlfriend), Julie Sherman, have managed to track down. Invariably worshipful in tone, these letters become embarrassing to read. Also troubling is Hackworth's determination to settle past scores. An abrasive personality, the colonel picked up a lot of enemies along the way, and he seems eager to get back at them all. This raises questions about the fairness of his account.

Readers who manage to wade through all the war stories, chest-puffing, and blood-letting will find buried in *About Face* a stinging indictment of America's performance during the Vietnam war. Much of Hackworth's critique is familiar. Top officers lived in plush, air-conditioned quarters, insulated from the realities of the war. Lazy commanders set up huge World War II-style base camps—senseless in a war without fronts—and sent their troops on unwieldy search-and-destroy operations that the guerrillas had little trouble eluding. Draftees bound for Vietnam were trained in the desert, in the snow—in all habitats but the tropical one they would encounter in Vietnam. Barely able to pull the pin on a grenade, these soldiers were no

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match for the highly disciplined VC, who quickly chewed them up in battle.

Appalled by such incompetence, Hackworth yearned for his own battalion. He finally got it in 1969. Hackworth's account of his efforts to transform the 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, from a long-haired, love-beaded unit of pot smokers into a "perfect fighting force" is by far the most interesting part of the book. "The basic concepts behind my changes," he explains, "were that men, not helicopters or mechanical gimmicks, won battles, and that the only way to defeat the present enemy in the present war at a low cost in friendly countries was through adopting the enemy's own tactics, i.e., 'out G-ing the G' through surprise, deception, cunning, mobility. . . imagination, and familiarity with the terrain."

The American bias

To familiarize his officers with the VC, Hackworth made them all read Mao's *Little Red Book*. To take the battlefield back from the enemy, he broke down his troops into seven-man units and sent them on night patrols. He trained snipers to pick off napping VC and set up elaborate traps to flush them from their hiding places. In one spectacularly successful operation, Hackworth lured the enemy into taking an apparent escape route that in fact was lined with his own troops waiting in ambush. The VC lost 113 men while Hackworth's battalion took only four casualties, all of them slightly wounded. Buoyed by such successes, Hackworth energetically promoted his guerrilla-style tactics. Alas, there were few takers, and as a result, he remarks, "The same mistakes were allowed to be made, day after day after day." Hackworth eventually accepted ABC's invitation to go on national television. American boys, he dramatically declared, were dying needlessly due to the neglect and stupidity of America's generals.

Looking back, Hackworth believes that, had other commanders followed his example, "the war could have been won, at least from a military standpoint." In this, he diverges from Sheehan, who argues in *A Bright, Shining Lie* that the U.S. effort in Vietnam was doomed from the outset. In fact, *About Face* offers a lot of evidence to back up Sheehan's case. The South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) comes off so badly in the book that it's hard to imagine it beating anybody, however much help the U.S. gave it. In Hackworth's words, ARVN's soldiers acted "the role of occupier—raping women, stealing livestock and rice—rather than protector of the people," making them the "best recruiters in the country." Generally speaking, Hackworth writes, ARVN's officers had "little leadership ability, no initiative to act in the absence of orders. . . and no will to win."

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Hackworth places much of the blame for this on the U.S. military. Thanks to the American advisers' "conventional mindset," he writes, ARVN "was not trained for the guerrilla war burgeoning within its own boundaries." Hackworth thinks that the U.S. advisers should have gotten much tougher with their underlings: "While all along we paid the bills for the war effort and kept our toys and boys coming, we had little real control—indeed, took little real control—over the Viet leaders on the receiving end." The Americans, he adds, should have "*told* the Viets what was to be. . ." (emphasis in original). Had they done so, he writes, the outcome of the war might have been very different.

All of this sounds remarkably like the lieutenant colonels' report on El Salvador. It, too, complains bitterly about the performance of the Salvadoran government and military and urges the U.S. to lean harder on them. The lieutenant colonels fault the Salvadoran army for not adopting aggressive, small-unit tactics, and they hold the U.S. responsible, in part, for that failure. "Despite the oft-expressed American intent to convert the [Salvadoran armed forces] into a counterinsurgent force," they write, "U.S. policy has failed to wean the Salvadorans from the conventional mindset. If anything, American actions have reinforced this bias" by, for instance, providing the Salvadorans with sophisticated hardware that is useless against the hit-and-run tactics of the guerrillas.

The lieutenant colonels conclude:

"As long as it remains a great power, the United States will find itself involved in conflicts like El Salvador's. But until the American defense establishment musters the commitment exemplified by adversaries such as the FMLN, such involvement will likely bring only disappointment and failure."

Hackworth's book contains a strikingly similar passage:

"Unless we could duplicate [the VC's] will and dedication, all the cannons, all the helicopters, all the high technology we could invent and employ, enough even to send men to the moon, would never beat them."

"Democratic" practices

These statements help illustrate the giant blind spot that occludes the vision of counterinsurgency enthusiasts as they look at conflict in the Third World. To their credit, people like Hackworth and the four lieutenant colonels recognize that guerrilla wars must be waged as much in the political and economic sphere as on the battlefield. They appreciate the need to understand a country's history, its culture, its social customs. And they talk endlessly about the need to make the government honest, to treat civilians with respect, to control human rights abuses. If only the United States pushes hard enough, they believe—if only we act with sufficient dedication and commitment—the proper reforms will follow.

It's on this last point that the counterinsurgency worldview collapses. If the Vietnamese army was as deeply corrupt and abusive as Hackworth makes it out to be, it's hard to see how the U.S. could have changed it. As Hackworth himself remarks at one point, the South Vietnamese never had a cause, never believed in anything, and so were unwilling to make the sacrifices needed to win the war. There's little the United States could have done about this. It's one thing to teach an army to break down into small units and patrol at night; it's quite another to give it a reason to fight. The same applies to El Salvador. True, the United States has helped eliminate some of the army's worst abuses. But, as the lieutenant colonels recognize, the Salvadoran military and government remain thoroughly incompetent, ineffective, and unpopular. It's ridiculous to expect 55 U.S. military advisers—or 55,000, for that matter—to change this.

What's more, the apostles of counterinsurgency fail to see that the very tactics they champion can undermine the goals of democracy and honest government that they purport to uphold. Classic counterinsurgency doctrine, for instance, calls for separating the guerrillas from the people—draining the "sea" in which the fish swim. Accomplishing this entails driving peasants from their native villages, imprisoning suspected sympathizers, and liquidating collaborators—not exactly an effective means of instilling democratic values. Viewed from the grassroots, no doubt, such "democratic" practices look suspiciously similar to the "terrorist" tactics used by the other side. Similarly, antiguerrilla warfare requires expanding, strengthening, equipping, and otherwise "modernizing" the local army. Given that military abuses are among the primary causes of insurgency, this enlarging of the army is likely to compound the problem, not solve it.

In the end, the counterinsurgency buffs suffer from the same delusion as those they criticize—a naive faith in American power. They fail to understand that the brutality, corruption, and injustice that give rise to revolutionary movements are so deeply ingrained that no outside power, however mighty, can heal them. One might propose an axiom of Third World insurgency: If things have reached the point where a regime must be coached by foreigners in how to treat its own people, then there's little hope for its survival. That, ultimately, is why the U.S. could not in win Vietnam. It's also why we cannot win in El Salvador. □

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Fumbling the Future: How Xerox Invented, then Ignored, the First Personal Computer. Douglas K. Smith, Robert C. Alexander. *Morrow, $18.95.* In the early 1970s, computer scientists at a California research center called Xerox PARC built a machine, the Alto, that is considered to have been the world's first personal computer. PARC, in fact, was the theoretical spawning ground for the then-revolutionary notion that the immense power of mainframe computers could be brought to the desktops of individuals. PARC produced many other computer firsts—a pioneering word processing language, a "local area network" through which computers could talk to each other, a laser printer, and a "mouse" for moving characters on the computer screen.

Measured scientifically, these were remarkable achievements. Measured by business standards, however, PARC was a disappointment. Xerox was unable to translate its technological prowess into commercial success. When the company finally introduced a computer based on PARC technology into a market flooded with competitors, the machine was too expensive and too slow.

Authors Douglas K. Smith and Robert C. Alexander, management consultants, show that great science will be wasted unless a company is flexible enough to get good products out of the labs and into the hands of customers—quickly. Xerox had become wealthy and powerful from its near-monopoly in photocopying; net income rose from $3 million in 1959 to $348 million in 1974. But while profits climbed, a bureaucracy that wags called "Burox" settled in.

The head of Xerox, Peter McColough, personified the enlightened business statesman—dabbling in Democratic politics, serving on prestigious charitable boards, spending millions of Xerox dollars to sponsor educational television. He moved corporate headquarters from gritty Rochester to preppy Stamford. McColough also became enamored of something he called "an architecture of information," and in 1970 he commissioned the creation of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC) to try to figure out what that grandiose phrase meant.

PARC scientists quickly developed a reputation for brilliance matched only by a reputation for bad manners. An alumnus of the center admits, "PARC suffered from a whole lot of arrogance. If you didn't understand automatically, you were 'stupid.' It's hard to get a good hearing that way." An irreversible case of communications gridlock set in between PARC and the rest of the corporation.

Meanwhile, back in Stamford, Xerox was following the same path as American car manufacturers by concentrating on large, high-profit equip-

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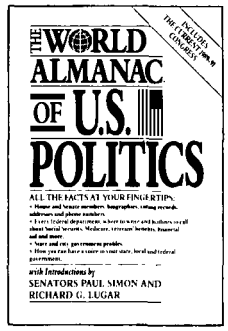

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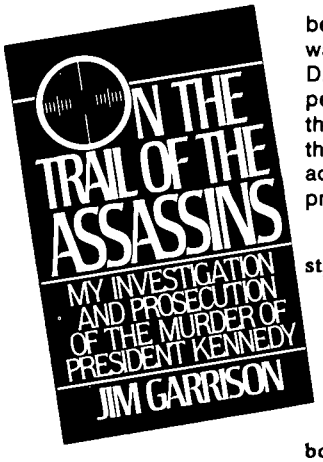

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ment while giving little consideration to the Japanese, who were selling smaller, less expensive, high-quality machines. The resemblance to the car industry was more than coincidental—Xerox management was loaded with senior financial executives recruited from Ford Motor Company. Problems kept mounting. Big customers defected when Kodak introduced a better copier. The Alto languished in the PARC labs. Yet, despite revisions of the organization charts, soaring pronouncements from top executives, and more money poured into research, Xerox was unable to change. When the PARC scientists proudly displayed a personal computer at a 1977 management conference, the wives of the Xerox executives were enthralled by the graphics, the mouse, and the color printers. But the men, who had little understanding of office automation and a macho aversion to typewriter keyboards, peered in a standoffish way and asked, 'Oh, can it do that?' "

Fumbling the Future is not an easy book. The identities of the characters get blurred. Key passages of the book discuss technical aspects of computers. And the book ends abruptly, with the resignation of PARC's director in 1983. It needs a wrap-up chapter with the authors' analyses and conclusions.

Nevertheless, *Fumbling the Future* is a superb case study of an organization at war with itself. Two conclusions can be drawn from the book—one cautionary, the other heartening. The alarming theme is that American business is very thin in engineering know-how at the top. "Engineering ignorance beset all senior executives at Xerox," Smith and Alexander write. "No one had ever run a product development program. . .there was no one who could say that such and such should cost less or should be doable faster." This problem goes beyond Xerox. According to McKinsey & Co., the management consultants, American companies are suffering from an "engineering gap" because they bury engineers deep within their organizations and give them little or no authority for the final product. The Japanese, in contrast, give their engineers wide authority, lots of contact with customers, and overall responsibility for the end product. Superior design and

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engineering—*not* total dollars spent on research and development—are the major reasons why so many Japanese products work better and cost less.

The second, more encouraging theme is that, in an entrepreneurial economy, for every corporate behemoth like Xerox that gets paralyzed by oncoming headlights, there are hundreds of small, sleek enterprises ready to leap ahead. Although Xerox has made a comeback in the copier business, it is still losing prodigious sums of money in electronics. Fully half of the company's profits now come from a financial services arm, which sells stocks and insurance, and Xerox is frequently rumored as a target for takeover and breakup. And it wasn't Xerox, but brash start-ups like Sun Microsystems, Apple Computer, Compaq, and Microsoft that converted the best of PARC's technologies into thriving new enterprises. Some of PARC's brightest scientists now work for these firms. Xerox may have fumbled the future, but its fumble also provided the opportunity for fast-moving new competitors to race ahead and make the personal computer as ubiquitous in the workplace as—well, a Xerox machine.

—*David Graulich*

A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till. Stephen J. Whitfield. *Free Press, $19.95.* Though the circumstances and the victims were worlds apart, the murder of Emmett Till in 1955, like the death of John F. Kennedy eight years later, shocked a generation out of its innocence. Yet for more than 30 years, Till has been relegated to the status of a footnote. Whitfield's book places Till's murder as a crucial, if hidden, event in the history of civil rights.

In August 1955, the 14-year-old Till traveled from Chicago to visit relatives in the Mississippi Delta. Once there, he whistled at, and perhaps propositioned, a white woman named Carolyn Bryant, wife of a local grocery store owner in a town called Money. Shortly after the encounter, Bryant's husband, Roy, and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, apparently dragged Till out of bed, beat him, shot him, and tossed his body into the Tallahatchie River. When the badly mutilated corpse turned up several days later, Till's family identified Bryant and Milam as the men who had kidnapped the boy. They were arrested, brought to trial on kidnapping and murder charges, and speedily acquitted by an all-white jury. Soon after, they sold their story to a *Look* magazine writer in lurid, lucrative detail, all but confessing to the crime.

Countless blacks have been the victims of vigilante violence in the South; but Till's murder, coming as it did only months after *Brown v. Board of Education* put Jim Crow under a death sentence, hit blacks especially hard. As white politicians played to southern white hysteria, the Till case suggested how difficult and dangerous it would be to dismantle segregation. This wasn't Klan-style, organized violence but the act of ordinary white folk. And, unlike the 1964 killings in Philadelphia, Mississippi, it wasn't aimed at an agitator or political activist but a teenage boy. The graphic depictions of the crime published in *Look* and *Life* and *Jet* and the daily press reminded blacks just how vicious the reaction to the new climate of *Brown* could be.

Many who were children or teenagers at the time describe Till's death as the point when they became painfully aware of what it meant to be black, and many went on as a result to swell the civil rights movement.

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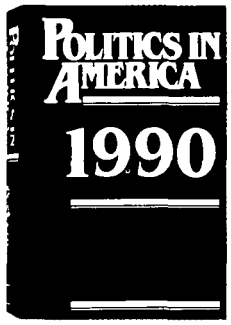

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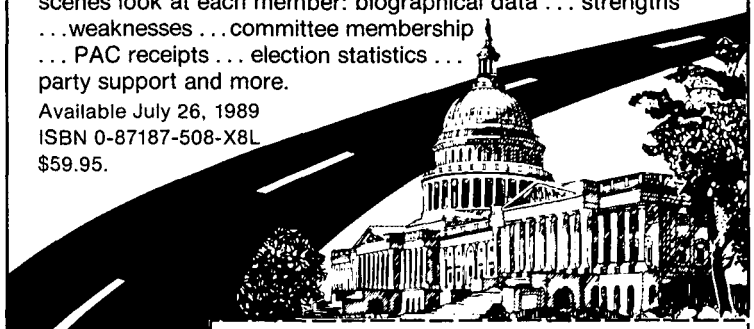

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"Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil," recalls one of those activists, Anne Moody. "But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black." Other prominent blacks, from Eldridge Cleaver to Toni Morrison, speak of the influence the case had on them and their work. Muhammed Ali, almost exactly Till's age, recalls the "deep kinship" he felt with the victim. Emmett Till quickly became a watchword of the civil rights movement, a rallying cry. Whitfield's book indicates that, in killing Till, two white southerners only put another nail in the coffin of the very thing they were trying to keep alive.

—Jennifer Howard

A Turn in the South. V.S. Naipaul. *Knopf, $18.95.* This is a curious book altogether. It lacks the coherence of Naipaul's earlier nonfiction and is more ramble than essay, full of chance encounters and long, breezy interviews with catfish farmers, waitresses, motel clerks, writers, and especially preachers, for whom Naipaul has always had a nose. It's charming to follow this Indian raised in Trinidad, who looks from his jacket photograph like an aged Seminole or Creek, as he checks in and out of rural motels in Mississippi and Alabama, discovers rednecks for the first time and tries to imagine that he's back on the Ganges: "In a pond beside the road on the way to Fort Oglethorpe [Georgia], cattle stood in muddy water up to their bellies—one might have been in India."

But this is not an idle ramble. It's soon apparent that Naipaul is taking a position, although whether this came to him beforehand or during the journey is unclear. What he argues, essentially, is that the New South (the fast-growing cities, the research centers, the prosperous university towns) is alienating and somehow evil, while the Old South, the poor and rural South, offers faith, community, and significance. This is fascinating to those of us who are more likely to associate the indecency of racism with the Old South and moral regeneration with the New.

His decision to condemn the contemporary and to revel in the bygone causes Naipaul to be curiously selective in his treatment of the race problem. He levels his outrage against Atlanta, the capital of the New South and a place where blacks are believed

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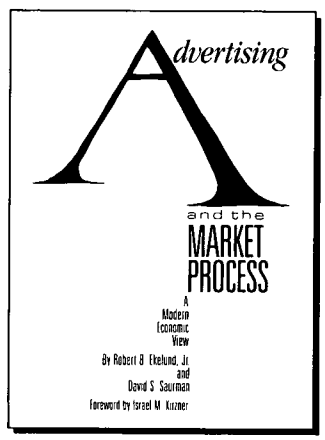

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to have gotten ahead. His point about Atlanta is that blacks may have gained political power but not economic power, and that the one without the other is worse than no power at all: "Perhaps the very dignity that the politics of the city offered a black man made him more aware of the great encircling wealth and true power of white Atlanta. So that the politics of Atlanta might have seemed like a game, a drawing off of rage from black people."

As right as Naipaul may be about Atlanta, his conclusion that the city's racial progress is worse than nothing has another unstated purpose. It enables him to glorify parts of the Old South, where blacks are even less likely to move ahead. Once he's left Atlanta and headed for Charleston, Naipaul drops his cudgel and allows himself to be romanced by the "order and faith, music and melancholy" of the remnants of plantation culture. From blacks and whites alike, we hear that the past was better than the present, and several black people speak fondly of segregation, when at least they enjoyed the fellowship and cohesion of being victims, while now they've lost their place in the world.

A Baptist pastor from Tennessee explains how the civil rights movement itself has lost definition:

"In the old days. . . if you saw 5,000 blacks marching around a courthouse, and you asked them why they were marching, they would say they were marching because they weren't being registered as voters. If you saw black people demonstrating at a lunch counter, they would tell you it was because they weren't allowed to eat at lunch counters. There was no trouble at all about the cause then.

"Today. . .the issues are not as clear. Today, if you saw 5,000 blacks marching, the only thing they can say is, 'We are marching around the courthouse because we are still niggers to you.' "

That black people say they prefer segregation to what they've got now is a provocative notion that Naipaul puts to a strange use. He's no Orville Faubus, quite the opposite, and yet he comes close to adopting the arguments of old-line bigots that blacks and white were better off separate—so even in that way the Old South was preferable to the New. His

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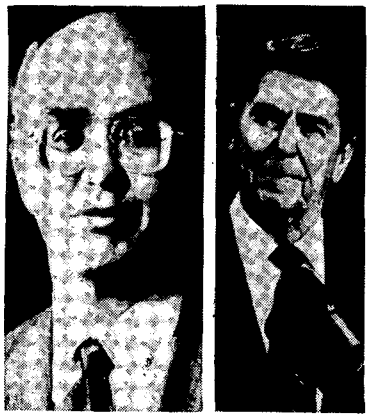

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sympathetic portraits of redneck heroes, and of decent white sheriffs and intelligent gentlemen farmers, are a welcome antidote to the unflattering caricatures we often get on television; but in the end his enthusiasms are suspect. "In no part of the world," says Naipaul, "had I found people so driven by the idea of good behavior and the good religious life."

He finds religion everywhere, even in things that aren't apparently religious: "religion was like something in the air, a store of emotion on which people could draw"; "it's more like religion" (speaking of a certain woman's attitude toward her family); "defeat like this leads to religion" (speaking of the Civil War); "that grief was special and was like religion."

Religion everywhere; a fascination for agrarian ritual; lost souls; a preference for the unhappy past; we've read it all before in *India: A Wounded Civilization*. Ultimately, you realize that it's not just the cow in Fort Oglethorpe but everything else in his journey through the South that reminds Naipaul of India, and that this whole trip is a kind of literal recreation. This would explain his rejection of the modern South in favor of "the past of which the dead or alienated plantations spoke."

The Old South as India, there are remarkable similarities: the consternation with a particular period when outsiders ruled (Reconstruction, the British occupation); a hearkening back to a golden age; a reverence for the native soil; an elaborate caste system with which to divide up the races; a preoccupation with one's place in society that's more important than money; a religious and political martyr (Gandhi, King) who preached nonviolence, led people to freedom, and was assassinated.

Yet in the end, precisely the same qualities that Naipaul identified as ruinous to India (a culture too bound up with fantasy, with ritual, with caste, with imaginative history, with defeat) he somehow sees as the salvation of the South. This idea leaves this white reader, at least, with the same uneasy feeling I get when I listen to an old recording of "Swanee, How I Love Ya," or "Rock-a-bye Your Baby With a Dixie Melody."

—John Rothchild

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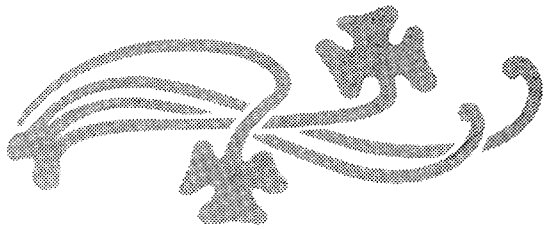

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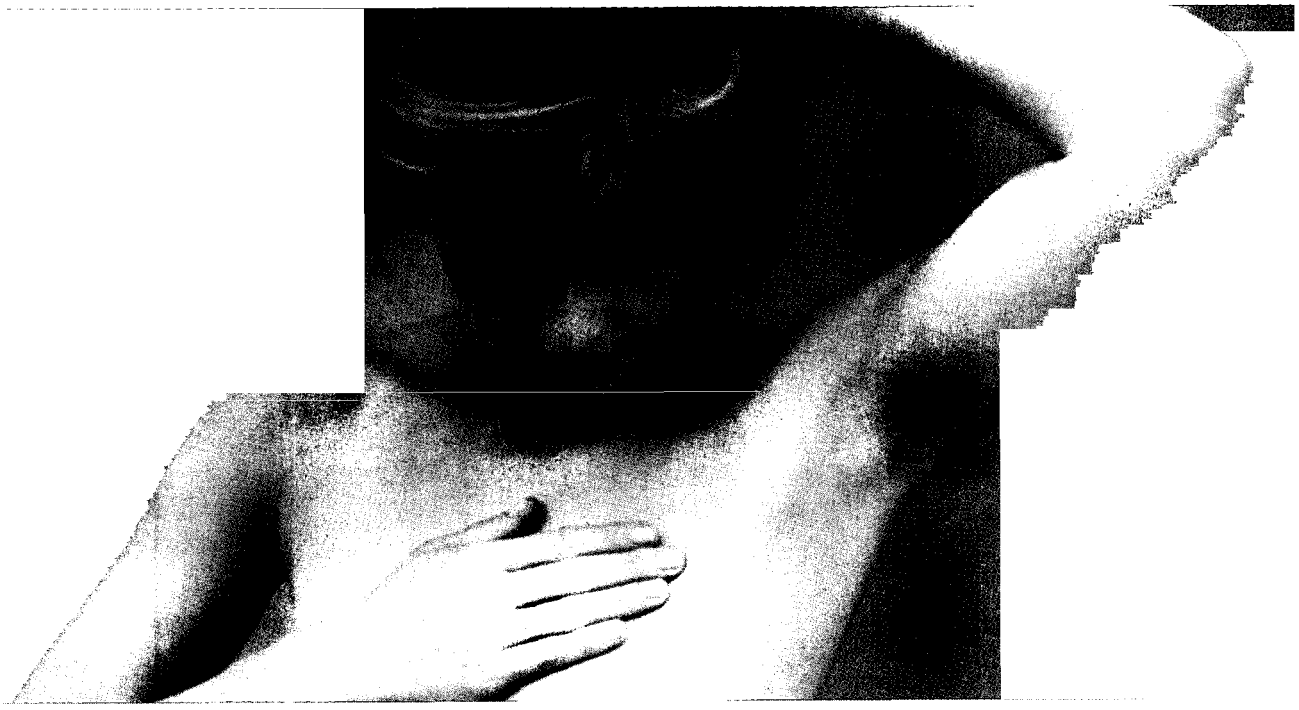

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